

# **"THE *NEW RIGHT* EDUCATIONAL REFORMS - watershed or smokescreen"**

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by  
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## **PREFACE :**

When I first became interested in those reforms and initiatives which had been labeled as “New Right” phenomena, it seemed to me that teachers and educators needed to confront, understand and evaluate these tendencies. This was especially so in those areas of educational reform which seemed to be driven by “new right” thinking. Moreover, it seemed to me that we were dealing with a powerful force emanating from overseas countries, and having a specific intellectual history, and that its influence was already being reflected in educational reforms being initiated in Australia.

I decided to select, as an example, those changes made to the Educational system by the Victorian Liberal Government in 1992. By choosing this example, I hoped in the first two chapters to (1) clarify the notion of the “New Right” and (2) demonstrate how new right tendencies were having their effect on the Australian educational scene. I would then proceed in the following four chapters to inquire into the historical basis of new right tendencies, review some of the literature which discusses “new right” ideology, and examine the impact of “new right” thinking in Britain and the United States of America. Then, in chapter seven I would, using as a basis a comparative review of the British and United States’ initiatives, give my own evaluation of the “new right” ideology.

By and large, the structure of my thesis is still as originally intended. However, it became apparent to me, on investigating the Victorian initiatives, that it is not always obvious when educational reforms are to be appropriately labeled as “new right” phenomena. For one thing, the label of “new right” may sometimes be disavowed by those who are promoting the reforms, the promoters of the reforms claiming that the restructuring taking place is a response to economic contingencies which have nothing to do with “new right” thinking but are simply matters of commonsense expediency. Moreover, such apparently “new right” concepts, such as “school-based-self-

management”, can be seen as having a long history of support by both Liberal and Labour government supporters and by educational theorists of both the left and right. In other words, educational reforms may conform to “new right” principles without their actually being driven by “new right” thinking. Any claim that the Victorian initiatives exemplify “new right” thinking therefore has to be argued for.

In the first two chapters I argue that the literature justifying such initiatives does show that the reforms are at least in part driven by “new right” thinking, and this becomes evident when we consider the motives for the reforms and not just the reforms themselves. I suggest that while the ideology of “new right” thinking appeals to concepts such as freedom, self-management and autonomy (concepts which educators of many persuasions would find congenial), in fact, these concepts and principles are not valued for educational reasons but for reasons to do with economic rationalism. I return to this topic in chapter seven where I consider, in detail, the claim that “new right” thinking demonstrates a respect for freedom and autonomy. My argument is that, while the “new right” philosophy may contain concepts and principles which sound attractive to many educators, these concepts are a smokescreen for what is, in reality, a free market ideology which does not have education as one of its central or over-riding values.

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## CHAPTER 1

# **The Seeds of Change are Planted**

A discussion of the possible more general  
educational implications caused by the change of  
government in the state of Victoria.

In the wake of the landslide victory by the Liberal Party in the Victorian State Government elections of October, 1992, a Mr. Don Hayward was chosen as the new Education Minister. The State was still reeling from an enormous burden of financial debt caused through the collapse of certain Financial Institutions within the State which, in turn, resulted in the Victorian Government having to assume fiscal responsibility for their financial losses. Hence, stringent distribution of greatly reduced financial resources was required and with the Education budget traditionally being one of the largest it was only natural to assume that it would have to be significantly trimmed.

Mr. Hayward came to this crucial educational position with a predominantly industrial background having been a former General Motors executive and public relations officer. It was truly an intriguing situation. All of the inherent ingredients within the Educational Ministry only added to the puzzle; a change in government to a Liberal Government, an accepted mandate to radically reduce government expenditure, an expectation that there would be a large reduction in the educational budget, and a non-educationist as the Minister overseeing these fiscal cuts.

While at the same time on the national educational front, the Federal Government's Educational Minister, Mr. John Dawkins, had created a widespread perception of dissatisfaction with the current quality, uniformity and outcomes of the educational curriculum throughout Australia. Mr. Dawkins had initiated educational reforms which had strongly supported the perception for the need to tailor educational outcomes to national economic interests. This philosophy had spawned numerous related national reports, including the Finn (1991), the Mayer (1992) and the Carmichael (1992) Reports, which developed and progressed these views to a more concrete level. At the very basis of this understanding is the belief that the interests of the individual learner are subordinate to the interests of the state.

One could assume that, with his industrial background and with a desperate need to alter the educational system, Mr. Hayward would have embraced the national initiatives.

Certainly, the national actions, through their general undermining of the public acceptance of Australia's educational standards, would greatly assist the widespread acceptance of any changes made within the educational system in Victoria. But what about the growing emphasis on the vocational direction of the education curriculum?

In an interview with Denis Muller, the education editor for "The Age" newspaper, published on the 19th. January, 1993, Mr. Hayward vehemently defends a view of education which encompasses more than simply preparing the individual for work. In this article Mr. Hayward is quoted as defining his personal view of education as

*" ... to allow a person to lead a full life, to give him a sense of enjoyment and understanding. The best education is not necessarily vocational education. ... Education should give a person a sense of self-worth and prepare him for work - but not necessarily in an economic sense; rather to equip him to have a purpose. ... Individual wellbeing must come ahead of macro-economic outcomes."*

(The Age "Education '93" supplement, 19/01/93, p.3)

At first glimpse, this personal understanding in regard to education seems quite banal and not particularly provocative. Such a belief would gain widespread acceptance from people of various political persuasions. In spite of this, further on in the same article Denis Muller endeavours to summarize his own understanding of Mr. Hayward's beliefs in the following observation:

*" (Mr. Hayward's) message, if delivered somewhat anecdotally, is clear: the politicians and bureaucrats cannot be allowed to dictate to individuals how they should educate themselves, and the nation will be better off if each person does what he or she aspires to."*

(The Age "Education '93" supplement, 19/01/93, p.3)

Muller goes on to relate this personal reflection to the manner by which Mr. Hayward will deal with industrial relations issues, that is, by consulting directly with teachers rather than through teacher unions. Again, such a course of action seems innocuous and harmless as it would appear to be an isolated aspect of the relationship between an



employer and employees, which should not affect the community at large. That is to say, just how schools function in their daily tasks of generating quality learning and teaching is usually distanced from issues associated with personnel and management relations unless, of course, there has been ongoing dissatisfaction and exceptional, and crucial, disagreement between the two parties.

It must be remembered though, most schools throughout Australia, both government and independent, are funded by both State and Federal Government subsidies.

Constitutional laws and Acts of Parliament ensure the continuation of fiscal support for the educational services of the nation. Traditionally, state governments, and even some non-government educational bodies, have administered the distribution of moneys, and their associated management and accountability responsibilities, through departments and bureaucracies. In so doing, centralized systems have been created and all supporting services, resources and coordination of personnel have been supervised by these Departments or Offices.

Hence, the educational arena can not be simply viewed as a two tiered work-force structure; employer and employee. Rather, in its simplest interpretation it has to be seen as a three tiered arrangement; employer, bureaucracy and employee. A more significant consideration is, even though one may argue that the power and authority can be classified as hierarchical within this structure, it must be acknowledged that the inter-relatedness and co-dependency across these three categories renders each of equal importance within the ongoing success of the whole educational operation.

Therefore, it is vitally crucial to note Muller's further contention that Mr. Hayward's skepticism of collectivism was going to be applied to the functioning of the Victorian Educational system, too. The bureaucracy would be bypassed and Cabinet would have a more direct line of communication with Principals, teachers and schools. In addition, the role of the teacher unions within such actions would also be diminished. Should this course of action be further extended to include a decreased role of educationists, and

education union representatives, on decision making bodies affecting schooling, education and the teaching profession, then one would suspect that Mr. Hayward intends to adopt similar tactics to those of other countries, particularly Britain and America, and which have been labeled as “New Right” initiatives.

However, at this point in time, it is also possible to create some plausible doubt about this assertion by adopting a significantly different interpretation of Mr. Hayward’s comments. To talk in terms of giving a person “a sense of enjoyment” and “a sense of self-worth” through education rather than referring to the economic needs of the country, and to add, “individual wellbeing must come ahead of macro-economic outcomes”, does not appear to come from an individual wholly committed to an economic rationalist perspective usually associated with the “New Right”. It could be assumed that if the Victorian Liberal Government had decided to incorporate a total commitment to implementing a “New Right” perspective in restructuring the state’s education system, then surely it would have selected a minister with a more firmly ensconced economic rationalist conviction.

Herein lies the dilemma. What exactly is happening within the educational system in Victoria ? All the proposed changes seem to be so dramatic, so unstoppable and so far-reaching that, as a teacher, I am left in a state of concern and bewilderment. The extraordinary breadth of the impact from these changes gives some credibility to the belief that they are associated with a radically new ideology, but are they ? Are the strong negative reactions from many educationists caused by the destabilizing and unsettling effects of the changes, or, as they would suggest, are they the result of righteous anger from the perceived application of an improper, and grossly inappropriate, political and economical doctrine on to their professional field ? There just seems to be so many contradicting factors surrounding these changes which, unfortunately, camouflages their true nature and greatly hinders a quick interpretation of their relative importance and significance.

For instance, it is suspected that Mr. Hayward is going to oversee a “New Right” revamp of the Victorian education system yet he does not appear to have the personal conviction to support such a stance. Next, the changes appear to be unusually harsh, extreme and provocative, but the state of Victoria was publicly acknowledged as being in a diabolical financial situation, such that, the incoming new Liberal government may not have had any other fiscal alternatives. Also, it must be acknowledged from the outset that the changes effected by the Victorian Government are matters of fact, but, the claim that they are expressive of New Right ideology may only be an interpretation. While it is true that a New Right ideologue might implement similar changes it does not necessarily follow that a government implementing such changes is of the New Right.

In a similar vein, some people are very quick to want to label the proposed ministerial activities as being “New Right” in nature, yet, this only proves divisive rather than helpful when endeavouring to comprehend their basic tenets. Such claims tend to alienate sections of the community since many Australian people are skeptical, if not fearful, of extreme ideologues. Social outcomes resulting from Fascism and Communism, two examples of extreme political doctrines, are not beyond people’s personal experiences, or knowledge, and are generally abhorrent to most Australians. Therefore, to label the actions of the new government as “New Right” would immediately engender antagonism and opposition based purely on their supposed political ideology rather than on their merits. Even the mere process of aligning these changes directly to a particular political category, that is, the right-wing of politics, would automatically arouse opposition from those not sympathetic, if not antagonistic, towards this perspective even if its inherent principles were not specifically objectionable.

Yet on the other hand, the words within the title may have some appeal. In the context of a state financially strapped and desperate to amend its economic situation, this title could be seen as a life-line, a glimmer of economic hope, even for people adversely

affected by the failures of past right-wing economic doctrines. If it is truly “new” then it surely cannot be burdened with the failures of past economic imperatives and since, being new, it is yet to be tested and, therefore, deserves serious consideration. Further, it could be argued, old economic ways had not prevented the state from falling into such a predicament so a ‘new’, different and fresh economic approach could seem to be the only answer.

The outgoing Labour government, which, one would suspect, was significantly supportive of ‘left’ ideologies, had been the alleged incompetent managers of the state and, therefore, the cause of much of the economic plight. From this point of view, it could be simplistically assumed that a ‘right’ ideology, seeming to be a diametrically opposite ideology, would be needed to rectify the situation. In this way, it could be understood how many Victorians, who would not normally have supported a right-wing policy, would not oppose or object to its implementation by the new Liberal government. While for those people already favourably inclined towards right-wing political initiatives, the concept of a new, seemingly better and improved, ideology would have immense appeal. Consequently, in spite of the latent resistance by the Australian population, at large, towards extreme political doctrines, such as that implied in the label, “New Right”, the unusual situation within the state of Victoria would have nurtured a more general acceptance of just such an ideology. In this way, it could be argued, the Liberal government could be far more favourably disposed towards implementing just such a policy and, thereby, again giving support to the strong possibility that its educational actions are from the New Right doctrine.

Even if the Victorian Government’s actions are not motivated by “New Right” considerations, the fact is, for some educational pundits, who would seem to be in a position to be more cognizant with what is implicit in such a claim, their policies do appear to be very closely aligned to this particular doctrine. It is therefore not inconceivable that these changes could strengthen, or make more likely, a move to the

New Right should the Victorian Government's initial strategies prove to be somewhat successful, from an economic and administrative perspective, yet further fine tuning be deemed necessary in order to achieve some predetermined level of operational performance.

Clearly, before one can make an informed decision in regard to the acceptability of the educational changes occurring in Victoria, all of this doubt, confusion and uncertainty needs to be clarified. Given the general tightening of the whole Australian economy in recent years, it is quite conceivable for such initiatives, should they be deemed politically successful, to be more widely adopted throughout this country. Therefore, it behoves educationists to deepen their knowledge about what is meant by the terminology, "New Right", and to judge its significance for the education profession accordingly. In this way, one is more able to properly interpret, and react appropriately, to, not only the actions of the Victorian Government, but to any state or federal government which may choose to follow the same course of action.

Well, what exactly is meant by the term, "New Right" ? Although this will be more fully discussed in chapter 4, the essence of the New Right doctrine is a total commitment to choice, competition, free market forces, excellence and efficiency. More specifically, within the administration of an educational system this would be implemented through dismantling bureaucracies, devolving control and management back to individual schools, introducing some form of 'user pays' system for funding schools, creating processes of accountability, and introducing more clearly defined expectations in regard to educational outcomes based on the economic needs of the country.

Since the doctrine of the New Right is in accordance with free market orthodoxy, it would be characterized by self-interest, competition and inequality. As such, it would stand for the selling of education as a commodity in the market place, for private universities, for tuition fees in tertiary education, for private training rather than TAFE,

for the continued privatization of schooling and for a radical reduction in direct public funding of education. It also carries free market assumptions about the benefits of education being for the individual, rather than society, and the alleged inefficiencies arising from public provision of education.

Given this succinct insight into what may constitute actions associate with a government motivated by New Right doctrine, it is now opportune to take a more comprehensive look at the Victorian situation. This may help to clarify the credibility of the accusation that this new Government's tactics are based on a commitment to a New Right philosophy. This review of these activities occurs in the next Chapter. Even if this more close scrutiny of the changes occurring in Victoria does not prove decisive, the fact that, to many more knowledgeable people, these actions are closely aligned, or, at least, could create an environment more conducive to the future adoption of New Right doctrines, it would seem prudent to further investigate this political movement.

Therefore, subsequent to this investigation, Chapter 3 outlines the historical development of general governmental intervention into education, which then sets the scene for the discussion, in Chapter 4, of the right-wing attack on this strategy that culminates in the evolution of the "New Right" doctrine. Chapters 5 and 6 traces the impact of such a doctrine on the educational systems in England and the United States of America respectively. Finally, Chapter 7 draws upon these experiences and outlines the perceived implications for education, and educators, in Australia. The concluding chapter, Chapter 8, simply draws together all of the essential learnings from this review of the potential impact of New Right initiatives onto the Australian educational arena.

## CHAPTER 2

# **An Inspection of these Changes**

A more detailed review of actual changes implemented in the Victorian Education system and an examination of the possible nature of these, and other proposed, changes.

Within a month of assuming office, Mr. Hayward had announced an eight per cent staffing cut to all schools and this was to be achieved through voluntary redundancies. By the end of December, 1992, 2175 teachers, 500 education ministry public servants and 330 teachers from school support centres had opted for the redundancy package. However, this seemingly large reduction in personnel had fallen short of the number desired by the Government such that a second round of redundancy offers was launched in order to further reduce the teacher numbers by several hundred. In addition, at the end of the 1992 school year the Government permanently closed 55 primary and secondary schools, most of them in the metropolitan area. By the end of 1993 the debt reduction process had seen 79 schools closed and 2999 teachers accepting a redundancy package.

It was estimated that these drastic measures would trim approximately \$86 million from the state's \$2.8 billion education budget. As well, the works and services budget and the new schools programme was reduced by \$70 million to \$162 million. All of the 3760 school cleaning staff were sacked on the 31st of December, 1992, and their duties were subsequently offered to private cleaning services in order to gain an anticipated saving of some \$40 million.

With the school closures, the Victorian Government hoped to reduce its annual \$220,000 maintenance bill and reap the revenue from the sale of the closed school sites. All of the sites of the closed campuses were made available for private sale. Also, the Liberal Government substantially shelved the previous Labour Government's \$11 million plan to start building 20 new schools during 1993. Only five significant capital works projects were allowed to proceed and these were mainly to do with upgrades and additions to existing school campuses.

Predictively, these proposals greatly enraged teacher unions and communities directly affected by the school and teacher reductions. However, as the year progressed most



Victorians either accepted or became resigned to the futility of resisting the changes. Hence, by the year's end only a small minority of protesters, still occupying a closed school, remained but they were forcibly removed by the Police from the premises in December, 1993. It now appeared that this budgetary reduction phase of the Government's educational strategy was completed and with relatively little public acrimony.

It was inevitable that the Liberal Government would take the knife to the school education budget, the biggest single spending portfolio. The state of Victoria was reeling under the enormous financial impost caused by the massive losses associated with the collapse of the Pyramid Bank, which had to be underwritten by the Government, and the financial disaster of the Government owned merchant bank, Tricontinental. The state was virtually bankrupt. Naturally, there was widespread community outrage at the failure of the previous Labour Government to prevent these catastrophes, or at least to minimize their impact on the people of Victoria, and this was reflected in the huge swing to the Liberal Government in the state elections. The people knew that unpopular spending cuts had to be made and would not have been overly surprised by budgetary reductions in the areas of Education, Health and Transport.

In addition, the government also cited figures which supported the perception that the Victorian people were spending more on education than taxpayers in other Australian states. Therefore, within a culture of acceptance and expectation, the new Government vigorously and successfully set about implementing its fiscal changes.

Perhaps the prevailing acceptance of these changes had lulled most people into unquestionable acceptance of all of the educational changes being proposed. Or maybe, the heated and much publicized industrial action, and at times violent but isolated community resistance to school closures, had distracted the people from other changes occurring within the Victorian educational system. Whatever the reason, far more

fundamental and significant changes were also adopted by the Kennett Government during 1993.

As has been suggested, the school closures and the staff redundancies were more related to Treasury Department requests rather than being the desired strategy of the newly evolving Liberal Government's educational theory. However, this view certainly cannot be assigned to the concurrent changes made during 1993. These were more in keeping with Mr. Hayward's own aforementioned "individualism rather than collectivism" philosophy.

During 1993 the Kennett Government, under the ministerial control of Mr. Hayward, also implemented the first stage of a radical plan to re-organize Victorian state schools. It must be acknowledged from the outset that the initial development of this strategy had commenced under the previous Labour administration and to what extent the newly elected Liberal government was able to vary its final character will always remain as a contentious issue. This strategy, given the attention seeking title of "Schools of the Future", aimed to revolutionize school management. Essentially, a business manager would be appointed to each school in order to assist the Principal in running the school and, thereby, enabling the school to become self-managing. It was envisaged that, as this process became established, regional offices, which had traditionally offered advice, expertise and resources to many schools in their particular area, would be gradually run down and the resources transferred to schools.

Mr. Geoff Spring, the Director of School Education in Victoria, described the proposed changes in the following way,

*"In 1993 and beyond, Victorian schools will have the opportunity to become more self-managing within a broad, supportive framework, able to pursue their educational goals in ways that best suit them. Greater responsibility for the design of teaching and learning programs and for financial management in schools will be devolved*

*to local school communities. There will be a genuine sense of ownership of the direction in which schools are developing. ... An increase in authority and responsibility for Schools of the Future also demands increased accountability. Parents, local communities and the wider Victorian community have the right to know about educational outcomes. The directorate will ensure that schools assess effectively the educational progress of each student. The Schools Review Office will develop an accountability framework which will provide measures for assessing student progress and achievement. These measures will be used to inform students and parents as part of the normal reporting process, to help students evaluate the effectiveness of their programs, and to help the directorate give the public an accurate overview of education in the state."*

(The Age "Education '93" supplement, 19/01/93, p.4)

The stated purpose of Schools of the Future is to give schools control over their operations and future. Dr. Brian Caldwell, Reader and Associate Dean of Education at the University of Melbourne and a consultant to the Schools of the Future task force, is quoted as saying,

*"Far from being a leap into the unknown, Schools of the Future is a step forward in the devolution of authority and responsibility to schools."*

(The Age, 16/03/93, p.20)

Although this will mean more power to Principals and School Councils they still remain under the controlling guidance of the central bureaucracy, the Directorate of School Education (DSE). Questions about power centre on three main items: money, staff and curriculum. For many this division of power remains a cause for concern and mistrust. John Smyth, Professor and foundation Chair of Teacher Education at the Flinders University of South Australia, states that

*"(Schools of the Future) is not an exercise in which there is to be any real shift in power downwards to schools. Responsibility, yes, but power, no. Let us make no mistake about this. What processes like this are about is governments divesting themselves of some of the more annoying and pesky aspects of administration, while*

*retaining, and even intensifying, a tight grip on the power to shape overall directions through the formulation of policy, guidelines, frameworks and the like."* (The Age, 06/04/93, p.17)

Regardless of these criticisms, the Victorian Government created the "School Charter" as the instrument by which the school's power is defined and authority conferred. The Charter will be developed by each school within guidelines laid down by the DSE and it will be a formal agreement between the School Council and the DSE thereby providing the basis for the school's funding. In turn, the DSE, in accepting the school's Charter, also accepts responsibility for providing the money to make it work. Within each Charter the school will include statements about its own desired curriculum, discipline policy, programme evaluation and student assessment.

The amount of money provided by the DSE to each particular school will vary according to the school's "profile" which will be described in the Charter and determined from information gathered regarding the composition of the student body, the condition of the school fabric, relevant geographical characteristics such as isolation, and possibly the curriculum specialization that the school wishes to adopt. Obviously, there is contentious issues within such a system of categorization of schools and potential for tension between School Councils and the DSE. Not least being the Government, via the DSE, wanting to have some say over the number, kind and distribution of specialized programmes.

It has been stated by the Government that each Charter will have a three year life span and at the end of the this period the school's performance will be reviewed by a new bureaucracy, the Schools Review Office. The school's own charter will be the benchmark for this review.

Funding will be based on a "rolling triennial" system by which is meant that at the start of each triennium the DSE will negotiate with each School Council an agreed level of funding for the triennium but this will be reviewed annually in case changes caused by

enrollment or staffing fluctuations necessitate an alteration to the proposed level of funding. Within the funding arrangements it is anticipated that there will be two components to a school's grant : base and equity. The base component will cover the cost of educating a student in a regular programme that does not require special-needs money. Whereas, the equity component will provide extra money if needed to provide education of students who are disadvantaged or disabled. However, funds required to pay for special or innovative curriculum programmes will be assessed separately. Capital funding will continue to be controlled centrally. It was argued that the planning of new schools, and the upkeep of existing ones, needs to be done centrally and School Councils will continue to have only the responsibility for minor maintenance and capital works.

Far more controversial aspects of the Schools of the Future proposal deal with the role of the School Councils and their relationship with the Principals and their involvement in staff appointments and curriculum decisions. The powers held by School Councils will be extended to include the authority to make policy for the employment of non-teaching staff and contracted services of teachers for particular projects. One of the biggest changes is that the Principal will be responsible to the School Council for implementing its decisions, whereas previously, the Councils had only an advisory role. Principals will now be asked to serve two masters: the School Council and the DSE. It is anticipated that another Charter, the Principals' Charter, will be designed in order to reduce the conflict of interest and the tension and stress which may arise out of this invidious situation.

School Councils will be elected for a term of two years, with half retiring annually in rotation. These Councils can have a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 15 members but, in a move designed to limit the influence of teachers on the Councils, much to the ire of the teacher unions, the DSE has directed Councils not to elect more than one-third of

their membership from DSE employees (ie. the teachers). Within each school its Council will be responsible for :

- (1) Reaching an agreement with the Government on the school's Charter
- (2) Determining the policies of the school within the framework of the Charter
- (3) Approving the school development plan with a right of veto
- (4) Approving the school budget with the power to change it
- (5) Selecting the Principal, within guidelines laid down by the DSE, and being represented on panels that choose the Deputy Principals and Vice Principals
- (6) Authorizing the employment of non-teaching staff and short-term teaching staff
- (7) Approving the arrangements for the management of buildings and grounds
- (8) Approving the code of conduct for students and the school's student discipline policy
- (9) Writing an annual report to the Minister and local community.

Ultimately it is proposed that the school will select its own staff but they will continue to be employed by the DSE. The Principal will be selected by the School Council; he or she in turn will sit on a panel, which will also include other School Councilors, to select the Deputy Principals. All other staff will be selected by the Principal according to the school's own policy and selection procedures.

The system for getting rid of unsatisfactory teachers will be radically changed. It is suggested that the Principal will convene an advisory panel representing themselves, other local Principals, the school's staff and possibly the regional office to suggest how the problem might be solved. The solution is to be tried for three months but if the teacher is not shaping up then it will be up to the Principal to initiate an appropriate removal process.

This, then, is a thumb-nail sketch of the "Schools of the Future" plan as introduced by the Victorian Liberal Government. Brian Caldwell sees educational advantages being created through these changes and writes,

*"It's hard to identify a single country anywhere where a move to decentralize authority and responsibility to the school level is not under way. ... Self-managing schools should be more responsive, more personalized and more efficient schools - and therefore better places of learning. ... We now recognize that schools are different, that each school has a unique mixture of students and we are now setting extremely high expectations on our schools. We expect all schools to succeed with virtually all students. To make this possible schools need two things. ... First, they need as much of the education dollar as possible available at the school level. Second, schools need the capacity to plan for their own students and be able to properly fund the plan."* (The Age, 16/03/93, p.20)

On the other hand, John Smyth is far less praiseworthy in his analysis of the situation and observes that,

*"Schools of the Future is about the Government formulating policy over the things that matter, then passing them down the line for schools to dutifully implement. All of this is in a context where there is a reduction in overall funds for education; there is no longer any opportunity or mechanism to exert political pressure via regional boards and the bureaucracy, for a fairer deal for education; and where schools are expected to compete against one another for students and resources.*

*Schools of the Future, and its equivalent in other places, are about dismantling centralized education systems, which have traditionally supported the work of teachers, and replacing them with an alleged free-market ideology of "competition" and "choice".*

*Schemes such as this take us down a road of social Darwinism in which schools that can compete will be adequately resourced, and others will go to the wall."* (The Age, 06/04/93, p.17)

The decentralization processes within the educational systems of other countries referred to by Caldwell, such as Britain, the United States and New Zealand, have encouraged some to collectively label them as "New Right" initiatives for the restructuring of educational services. As outlined in the previous chapter, and elaborated upon more broadly in Chapter 4, the basic tenets of this theory proposes an educational system based on choice, competition and free-market forces with a minimum of governmental intervention. Smyth infers this link with the New Right movement when he suggests that a "free-market ideology" is at the root of all these changes. Notwithstanding the specific accuracy of Smyth's assertions, it is unquestionably true that many people, including very reputable educationists, are wanting to label these changes with, what some may call, the stigma of New Right ideology.

Yet, it would be presumptuous to accept such a stance too hastily. People, who favour these changes, could argue that it is fallacious for those critics, wishing to undermine the credibility of these restructuring changes, to associate them solely with the New Right movement. Their argument would be based upon the premise that school-based management, with all its perceived inherent problems and weaknesses, has often been raised as a preferred educational option by numerous and various sources, including both left-wing and right-wing political groups, in the past. There has been a long history of support for school-based management in Australia as highlighted in the 1973 Karmel Report (p.10), which outlined a case for devolution within education. This Report proposed that a more decentralized, grass-roots approach to the control over the operation of schools was clearly necessary. This proposition stemmed from the Committee's belief that school effectiveness would be enhanced when those entrusted with making decisions and those responsible for implementing them are one and the same people. This is to say, in its developed form, devolution would mean some form of local school management. Therefore, "Schools of the Future" could be seen as having accepted this mantle of responsibility for empowering the local school community unlike any other governmental program before it.



In support of the belief that school based management is not solely the preferred choice of only right wing pundits, it could be said that, in the early eighties, left wing, socially conscious Australian educationists would have heralded a move to align school management with their local community as a very positive development. Connell and his contemporaries, for example, would have applauded the push towards dismantling the central control of the bureaucracies and making working class schools “organic to their class”. (Connell et al, 1982, 202) In this light, “Schools of the Future” could be seen as a means of democratizing control of schools through giving some power, control, authority and responsibility back to the local school community and empowering parents, teachers and students to assume a rightful role in the administration of their school. Thereby, Connell would argue, the school would become more attune and relevant towards those who it is meant to serve.

But are the two concepts of “devolution”, as defined by the Victorian “Schools of the Future” document, and, what Connell refers to as, the “reconstruction of the relationships” identical in nature ? The unequivocal answer is, “No!” It is true that both of these strategies would lead to some form of diminished central responsibility for education being linked with a corresponding increase in local community responsibility and contribution in the functioning of the school. But really, that is where the similarity finishes. That is to say, although some outcomes are comparable, the basic philosophy, reasoning and desired outcomes from the action are significantly different and, in some aspects, diametrically opposed. Connell seeks an education system which is relevant to the students, while “Schools of the Future” seeks an education system which is economically effective for the government.

Connell would wish schools to be more flexible and sensitive to the special needs and qualities of their local community and, thereby, more effectively cater for the vast inequalities in society. His greatest concern was for the education of the children from working class families for whom much of the school culture is an anathema. He firmly

believes that the middle class orientated school environment, with its associated academic experiences, behavioural expectations and resource standards, are beyond the needs, comprehension and interests of many Australian school children, who come from families in the lower socio-economic classes.

The form of decentralization within this vision would be characterized by the school varying its curriculum and teaching techniques in keeping with the knowledge, experiences and resources of the local families. It would also see some form of involvement of students and teachers in the school's policy making process. Finally, in order to allow these variations to occur, there would be sufficient independence from centralized control of the curriculum while maintaining an authoritative bureaucracy so as to facilitate the redistribution of resources to compensate disadvantaged communities.

This is what Connell means when he describes the need for schools to be "organic to their class". But of crucial importance in his scheme was his strong belief in not devolving administrative responsibility for the school to the local community. Connell believes,

*"One cannot rely on opening the school to 'the community', because most of the time there is no community. The working class is fragmented and divided against itself. ... what 'community control' is likely to mean in such circumstances is handing power from a departmental bureaucracy over to the local bourgeoisie - local business people, doctors, clergy, and the like"* (Connell, 1985, 201)

Put simply, the educational system in this ideology would see a vibrant and powerful, yet supportive, central bureaucracy being geared to redistribute resources and, thereby, nurture a myriad of very unique and different schools which would be offering quite a diverse range of curriculum experiences. Most schools would remain viable, and would be centrally supported, provided they remained true to the needs of their students.

On the other hand, under the Schools of the Future policy, as experienced through its implementation in Victoria, and which supported, or, at least, did not prevent, the closure of 79 schools, only economically efficient and effective schools are maintained. The key terms inherent in this strategy are excellence, quality, school effectiveness, equity, efficiency and accountability. In themselves, these words seem to be most appropriate and laudable within the context of education, but, in the Schools of the Future interpretation, their specific meaning becomes highly problematic.

Excellence and quality are limited to being applied to the perceived educational output and the relative school performance, which is apparently determined from questionable data gained from the academic performances of the respective schools' student cohort. While school effectiveness mirrors that of the business world, whereby, it is associated with strong leadership, teacher professionalism, clearly defined goals, strategic plans, high standards of expectation, relative autonomy, and parent support.

When defining "equity", Brian Caldwell writes,

*"... this means that every child, regardless of circumstances, should receive an education which will enable full development of capability."*  
(Dimmock, 1993, 171)

Further on, he raises his perception that past centrally funded and administered school systems have failed to meet this goal and obviously sympathizes with the "insistence that this rhetoric be brought to realization". His discussion then broadens to include the concept of per capita funding of education, which, Caldwell suggests, is a form of 'voucher' funding of education since, in essence, the student is the voucher. Wherever the child goes to school then there will follow the government funding. This belief can then easily lead to the understanding behind the Schools of the Future concept of equity since it incorporates the contention that every student should have the right to attend the school of their choice and every student should be able to maximize the government money associated with their attendance at a particular school. This is in keeping with a

free-market philosophy, whereby, the student is given the freedom to choose the best school to meet their individual needs and, therefore, “enable the full development of capability”. The school, in turn, is ‘rewarded’ for being seen as suitable, relevant and excellent by gaining the student’s funding allocation from the federal and state governments. Unlike the Connell belief, in which the onus should be on the government, the producer, to intervene and provide the availability of an excellent school structure and quality education for the children in a particular area, the Victorian government believes that the onus is on the child and the parents, the consumers, to provide the quality education by selecting the school which best provides what they need.

The influence of the right-wing, free-market, economically focused ideology is clearly visible in this aspect of the Victorian government’s educational premises. Within such an understanding, the issue of equity is covered by two sub-issues, equality and inclusion. Equity, a highly desired outcome for Australian education, is assumed to be met through the fact that every Australian student, irrespective of their socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity, academic ability or physical attributes, attracts a basic level of funding which is equal to their peers. Each child can then seek access to, that is, be included in, any government school of their choice. Closely aligned to this presumption in regard to the freedom of the student to choose the best school, and possessing the mobility to act accordingly by enrolling in this preferred school, is the Government’s belief that the acknowledged ‘good’ schools will get better, since more students will mean more income, and the ‘bad’ schools will close through a spiraling decrease in funded income.

Tied to this expectation is the desire for efficiency and accountability. It would be expected that the most efficient schools will utilize their enrollment generated financial income to enhance their perceived advantage; money cannot be wasted if the advantage is to be maintained or, preferably, increased. This presumes a high degree of financial auditing and accountability in order to ensure the best use of every dollar, but it also

includes some functional accountability, too, since the school has to ensure it is meeting the wishes and expectations of its consumers, the students and parents, or it could lose their vital support and cause them to enroll elsewhere, thereby, taking away a pivotal source of income.

Notably though, is the presence of a third form of accountability within this doctrine; the more demanding set of accountability requirements placed by the government directly onto the school. Much of the details of this have already been highlighted earlier in this chapter when discussing some of the specific actions implemented, or intending to be implemented, by the Victorian Liberal government. Such actions as; the creation of the School Charter, the introduction of closely defined and specifically constituted School Councils, and the increased dependence upon local responsibility through school self-management, were discussed and are tangible changes which reflect the government's push towards more stringent levels of school level accountability.

However, there is another dimension of this heightened form of accountability which must also be acknowledged. Caldwell raises this matter when, in discussing the pivotal issues associated with strategic planning within the concept of a self-managing school, he writes,

*"Perhaps the most important capability is concerned with curriculum, which is expected to be highly responsive to the needs of the nation."*  
(Dimmock, 1985, 170)

In highlighting this expectation, Caldwell is not only raising the now common trend in countries, which have already adopted New Right educational initiatives and where there is a strong movement towards a nationally defined and directed curriculum, but he is also underlining the significant differences between past calls for educational restructuring, and devolution, and those which are now occurring in Victoria. Connell wanted schools to grow closer to the needs of the people, as defined by the people

themselves, whereas, Caldwell would want schools to grow closer to the needs of the nation, as defined by the economic and political perceptions of the government.

Consequently, it would appear that the Victorian government is traveling down some form of right-wing influenced reform path. But, can it be labeled as “New Right”? It would be most imprudent to accept, on face value, the insinuation that it is wholly New Right reforms even though opponents to the Government’s actions are certainly strong in their belief that this is so. So far, the evidence presented only implies New Right ideology rather than substantiating such an interpretation. It must be recalled that Mr. Hayward’s actions so far could be interpreted as simply following fiscal restraint and introducing a form of long awaited educational devolution. In so doing, he would be living up to the expectations of the electorate and may have had no suitable alternative course to follow other than one which was partially New Right in nature. However, this does not, necessarily, imply that there is a total commitment to all that is involved within the New Right doctrine.

When one is emotionally disturbed by widespread school closures and loss of teachers, and associated perception of a diminished status for the educational profession, it can cloud one’s clarity of vision. In addition to this basic negativity and, as previously mentioned, to identify something as “New Right” in nature conjures up some sense of fear and trepidation in most Australians. Within this country’s relatively brief and somewhat isolated history, the role of extremists, or extreme ideologies, has been associated with times of war and social upheaval. Support for such people has usually been amongst the minority, while the majority have fought to maintain the more liberal and conventional perspective.

This is no less so within education in Australia today. In this country, most people working in education would have an inherent hesitancy, if not objection, to allowing an extreme right wing ideology to significantly influence it. For many, like myself, this

position is more based on emotion and ignorance than logic and knowledge. One's objection to the "New Right" is immediate, but one's awareness of what is implied by this persuasion is minimal and, quite possibly, erroneous.

Although the degree to which the Victorian state government is adopting a New Right ideology is problematic, other countries have been more widely acknowledged as having embraced such a philosophy. Therefore, given the strength of the emotive negativity within educationists for New Right initiatives, but, at the same time, the propensity for such a dogma to be introduced into Australia, it behoves one to more thoroughly investigate the basic tenets of such a political stance. It becomes a necessity to understand the essential qualities of such a policy, and to investigate its potential impact within education, by reviewing the situation in countries which have supposedly adopted this tactic. In this way it is hoped that one will not only gain a deeper comprehension of this New Right perspective, but will also be able to judge its relative merits along with an awareness of whether it is truly an innovative educational philosophy or simply a political tool to reduce a financial responsibility and to manage a ministerial portfolio. That is, is it truly a watershed or a smokescreen initiative.

However, since a basic tenet of the New Right doctrine is the eradication of governmental intervention into the field of education, it would seem logical to, first, trace the origins and ethics of political involvement in education and then to review how this is attacked by advocates for the New Right. In this way, one can build a more substantial understanding of this ideology while, at the same time, evolve a personalized professional conceptualization of its relative merits within the context of the Australian educational scene. For this reason, the next chapter, Chapter 3, outlines the history and philosophical evolution of government controlled educational systems. Then, Chapter 4 introduces the criticisms of political action which culminates in the development of the New Right perspective.

## CHAPTER 3

# **The Origins of Government Involvement in Education**

A review of literature which traces the philosophical development of support for the need for governments to actively encourage and financially support education.



In the realm of national economics the role governments can play in the affairs of the state can vary between the two extremes : laissez-faire and total intervention. On the one hand, with a pure laissez-faire ethos such as a Liberal Capitalist country, the government would allow the initiative and entrepreneurial skills of individuals to act in an entirely free market in which choice and competition would ensure the necessity, quality, cost and availability of products and services. Whereas, with a pure interventionist society such as in a Communist country, the government would control the actions of all individuals in order to produce goods and services deemed necessary and essential for the good of the state, to a level of quality acceptable to the state, and at a cost which ensures it is readily available to most, if not all, of the people of the state.

In most civilized countries today neither of these two pure forms of government exist. Even under the Communist regimes still in existence around the world some form of capitalism is being promoted. The breakdown of the Eastern-bloc countries, and the disintegration of the Communist governments which had controlled them in recent years, can be directly linked to their failing economies. It would appear that total government intervention and legislature control of the economy, and the activities of the people which creates the economy, leads to mediocrity in effort, quality and output such that eventually the state is, itself, adversely affected.

Yet, pure capitalism does not exist either. This possibly recognizes the inherent dangers of total individual freedom which could lead to excessive greed, inequality and apathy within and between societies. Such traits, if left unchecked, could also lead to the downfall of the Capitalist system since all members of the community must have some access to wealth if they are to have the resources to purchase goods and services and in order to do this in a proper and law-abiding way each person must be knowledgeable and accepting of the codes of ethics controlling such practices.

In his book entitled, "The End of Laissez-Faire", which, as the title suggests, is a reasoned entreaty for governments to play a more active interventionist role within society, Keynes posits,

*"... the conclusion that individuals acting independently for their own advantage will produce the greatest aggregate of wealth, depends on a variety of unreal assumptions to the effect that the processes of production and consumption are in no way organised, that there exists a sufficient foreknowledge of conditions and requirements, and that there are adequate opportunities of obtaining this foreknowledge."* (Keynes, 1926, p.32)

It is interesting to note the year that this book was published. Keynes is writing at a very early stage of this century and at a time when the industrial revolution was having a marked affect on the nature of society and the quality of life. At this particular time one could envisage great imbalances in the distribution of wealth as certain individuals or countries benefited enormously from successful industrial initiatives. Also, it would have been a time of little union power, very limited welfare assistance, and few opportunities for social advancement or education for the lower socio-economic groups. Prior to this time, governments would have had little need to legislate to intervene in the distribution of goods and services since these were often in sufficient supply within each local community. However, as the industrial revolution caused people to dislocate to large cities and generally become more worldly, there would have been a corresponding growth in the awareness of poverty, individual rights and alternative social conditions. Therefore, these social justice issues which evolved during the early part of the century, would surely have been creating, at least in the minds of some influential members of society, the opinion that perhaps it is the responsibility of governments to become involved in such matters.

It is quite understandable, then, that Keynes goes on to add,

*"Let us clear from the ground the meta-physical or general principles upon which, from time to time, laissez-faire has been founded. It is*

*not true that individuals possess a prescriptive "natural liberty" in their economic activities. There is no "compact" conferring perpetual rights on those who Have or on those who Acquire. The world is not so governed from above that private and social interest always coincide. It is not so managed here below that in practice they coincide. It is not a correct deduction from the Principles of Economics that enlightened self-interest always operates in the public interest. Nor is it true that self-interest generally is enlightened; more often individuals acting separately to promote their own ends are too ignorant or too weak to attain even these. Experience does not show that individuals, when they make up a social unit are always less clear-sighted than when they act separately.*

*We cannot therefore settle on abstract grounds, but must handle on its merits in detail what Burke termed "one of the finest problems in legislation, namely, to determine what the State ought to take upon itself to direct by the public wisdom, and what it ought to leave, with as little interference as possible, to individual exertion."*

(Keynes, 1926, p.39)

His vehement condemnation of laissez-faire economics continued but what is perhaps worth adding is his justification for collectivism and centralization.

*"Many of the greatest economic evils of our time are the fruits of risk, uncertainty, and ignorance. It is because particular individuals, fortunate in situation or in abilities, are able to take advantage of uncertainty and ignorance, and also because for the same reason big business is often a lottery, that great inequalities of wealth come about; and these same factors are also the cause of the Unemployment of Labour, or the disappointment of reasonable business expectations, and of the impairment of efficiency and production. Yet the cure lies outside the operations of individuals; it may even be to the interest of individuals to aggravate the disease. I believe that the cure for these things is partly to be sought in the deliberate control of the currency and of credit by a central institution, and partly in the collection and dissemination on a great scale of data relating to the business situation..."*

(Keynes, 1926, p.47)

It is upon such arguments, as those postulated by Keynes, that in democratically governed countries there is an acceptance of the right for the government to intervene, to varying degrees, in the economic affairs of the people.

This perception, which supports the need for governments to intervene for the overall good of the society, is often referred to as the "neighbourhood effect". West defines this economic phrase as,

*"Roughly speaking, the 'neighbourhood effect' argument stems from the common observation that 'no man is an island'. Many of his actions intentionally or unintentionally affect other people. Where these overspill effects are very pronounced, and do not show signs of ever being organised or brought under control by the market, one's normal reaction is to explore the possibility of government intervention."*(West, 1965 , p.29)

Milton Friedman takes a more holistic view of the "neighbourhood effect" in that he sees that such an argument can not only be used to defend government intervention but it can also be used to rationalize the restriction of government intervention if it is determined that such legislative action is counter-productive and detrimental to society.

*"Neighborhood effects cut both ways. They can be a reason for limiting the activities of government as well as for expanding them. Neighborhood effects impede voluntary exchange because it is difficult to identify the effects on third parties and to measure their magnitude; but this difficulty is present in governmental activity as well. It is hard to know when neighborhood effects are sufficiently large to justify particular costs in overcoming them and even harder to distribute the costs in an appropriate fashion."*

(Friedman, 1982 , p.31)

Friedman would further suggest that the neighbourhood effect draws into consideration a further issue since in its implementation someone, or some group, has to make a judgement about the ability of another individual, or group, to make an appropriate decision. That is to say, the freedom of some people within society is limited due to the

judgement or opinion of other more influential people giving rise to the belief that they are unable or incapable of acting in a proper or appropriate way. Friedman refers to this as "paternalism".

*"Freedom is a tenable objective only for responsible individuals. We do not believe in freedom for madmen or children. The necessity of drawing a line between responsible individuals and others is inescapable, yet it means that there is an essential ambiguity in our ultimate objective of freedom. Paternalism is inescapable for those whom we designate as not responsible."*

(Friedman, 1982 , p.33)

He goes on to add,

*"The paternalistic ground for governmental activity is in many ways the most troublesome to a liberal; for it involves the acceptance of a principle - that some shall decide for others - which he finds objectionable in most applications and which he rightly regards as a hallmark of his chief intellectual opponents, the proponents of collectivism in one or other of its guises, whether it be communism, socialism, or a welfare state."*

(Friedman, 1982 , p.33)

Further on Friedman suggests that "children" offer a far more difficult and challenging set of circumstances. He bases this view on the presumption that the ultimate operative unit in our society is the family, not the individual, but adds that the acceptance of the family as the unit rests in considerable part on expediency rather than principle. Friedman writes,

*"We believe that parents are generally best able to protect their children and to provide for their development into responsible individuals for whom freedom is appropriate. But we do not believe in the freedom of parents to do what they will with their children. The children are responsible individuals in embryo, and a believer in freedom believes in protecting their ultimate rights."*

(Friedman, 1982 , p.33)

I am sure most people would totally support the ideal which is encompassed within this statement. Surely an essential facet of what constitutes being fully human is the ability

and the desire to reflect upon, analyze and positively contribute towards the longevity of human existence. Consequently, this optimistic future of our species and our society is dependent upon the extensive development and socialization of its children, the next generation.

This imperative would endorse the right of governments to intervene on behalf of children even to the degree of controlling the actions of the family. Interventionist would argue that such actions are in the best interests of the child and ultimately the state and society. They would suggest, most strongly, that there are certain elements in the development of the child, which are so important, that their experience cannot be left to chance, preference or an ability to pay. Certain essential developmental experiences of any child can not, they would argue, be overlooked due to the ignorance, apathy, erroneous opinion or limited financial status of the parents.

*"According to John Stuart Mill, education was one of those exceptional cases in which the laissez-faire principle broke down because of the lack of adequate judgement on the part of the purchaser."*  
(West, 1965, p.122)

Naturally, such a notion leads to the application of the neighbourhood effect and governmental paternalism to education. West takes up this viewpoint when he writes,

*"How then does the neighbourhood effect analysis apply to education? Political economists usually have two particular instances in mind. The first is expressed in their contention that the social benefits of education are not confined to the 'educatee' but spread to society as a whole, most noticeably in the form of reduced crime and more 'social cohesion'. ... The second general example is the idea that education is an investment whose benefits also spillover to the economic advantage of society as a whole."*  
(West, 1965, p.31)

Although he is an antagonist of the interventionist theory, West does supply the reader of his text, "Education and the State : A Study in Political Economy", with an

interesting insight into what he believed to be the initial and somewhat unexpected motivating influences for governments actively supporting education.

*"But all the economists were strikingly united in one aspect at least of what can be called negative utilitarianism, that is, in the idea that education could reduce crime and disorder. ... In the hands of the English Utilitarians such thinking became sharpened into cold calculations of social profit and loss. Bentham estimated that government funds spent on education would probably be more than offset by the reduction of expenditure on prisons, and that therefore state investment on education was socially profitable."*

(West, 1965, p.112)

He goes on to add,

*"For the Utilitarian, education programmes were aimed solely at removing a very special kind of ignorance. Their precise objective was to remove the ignorance of what they, the Utilitarians, thought to be the best happiness-seeking instruments. People, as J. Roebuck insisted in Parliament, could not be happy themselves; they had to be taught how to be happy. Nobody could be truly liberated into a state of happiness unless his mind had previously been manipulated by Utilitarians. Only after state instruction would it be logical for the government to resort to punishment. Otherwise pleasure would be minimised and pain (crime) would be maximised."*

(West, 1965, p.115)

However, West also gives evidence to the aforementioned social justice issues causing some politically active individuals, like Adam Smith, to wish to challenge contemporary social norms to the point of linking government supported general education with enhanced social conditions.

*"For his part, Adam Smith, too, had his own special and paternalistic prescriptions for happiness, prescriptions which derived from his individual system of philosophy and sociology, and which he also wished to administer through the semi-authoritarian instrument of state-assisted schools. Smith's argument was that the most serious*

*contemporary cause of unhappiness was associated with the growing factory system and its division of labour. State education, he contended, was required mainly as an antidote to this new environment."*

(West, 1965, p.116)

Denis Lawton portrays a far more acceptable argument for the involvement of governments in education, in particular, with respect to making compulsory certain levels of education. He first raises the previously made suggestions regarding the priority of children's rights in relation to the actions of their parents.

*"In the case of compulsory schooling there is an implicit intention to give what are considered to be childrens 'needs' higher priority than parental choice. If all parents could be relied upon to make satisfactory arrangements for their children's education, then compulsion would be unnecessary. Because this is thought not to be the case, children are given legal protection against their own parents' apathy, recklessness or stupidity. For obvious reasons that justification for the legislation is nowhere spelt out quite so frankly, but the principle is clear; schooling is considered to be so high a priority - perhaps even a human right - that it overrides choice. An extension of the reasoning behind compulsion is that the state has a duty or responsibility to provide schooling of a reasonable quality, and that every child has a right or entitlement to schooling of a certain quality. It would be a strange law which made something compulsory but made no attempt to define what it was in terms of content and quality - hence the National Curriculum.*

(Lawton, 1992, p.84)

He then continues,

*"There is another aspect to the reasoning behind compulsion: the notion that education not only brings benefits to the individual, but that schooling of the right kind is advantageous to the community as a whole - producing better citizens, more caring parents, more efficient workers, fitter and better quality conscripts for the army, and so on. "*

(Lawton, 1992, p.85)



Friedman shares a similar perspective to that of Lawton and returns us to the initial two reasons proposed for the possible legislative intervention into education, namely the "neighbourhood effect" and "paternalism. Subsequently, his views are worthy of note,

*"... governmental intervention into education can be rationalized on two grounds. The first is the existence of substantial "neighborhood effects," i.e., circumstances under which the action of one individual imposes significant costs on other individuals for which it is not feasible to make him compensate them, or yields significant gains to other individuals for which it is not feasible to make them compensate him - circumstances that make voluntary exchange impossible. The second is the paternalistic concern for children and other irresponsible individuals."* (Friedman, 1982, p.85)

He goes on to clarify this statement in very clear and simple language and by using direct comparisons to other aspects of our lives which are affected by governmental involvement. But first, Friedman explains

*"A stable and democratic society is impossible without a minimum degree of literacy and knowledge on the part of most citizens and without widespread acceptance of some common set of values. Education can contribute to both. In consequence, the gain from the education of a child accrues not only to the child or to his parents but also to other members of the society. ... There is therefore a significant "neighborhood effect".* (Friedman, 1982, p.86)

At the very bottom of these beliefs was the firm conviction that the state's enhancement and advancement was directly related to improved and more general education of the people. It was presumed that through organizing a unified system of education for all then society, as a whole, would be more civilized, more law abiding, more committed to work, more productive, and therefore more economically successful. Such goals were seen to be too precious and too valuable to leave to the vagaries of individual family priorities and so education became the direct concern of the government. General

and uniform education, through direct government intervention, was an economic imperative rather than a purely educational philosophy.

## CHAPTER 4

# **The Tide Turns - the rise of the New Right Ideology**

A review of literature which reveals the evolution of dissatisfaction with government intervention and the corresponding promotion of the New Right perspective with particular reference to how this related to education and educational funding.

Many authors would wish to suggest that a crucial mistake was made at the very beginning of governmental intervention in education. Their contention is that governments misunderstood what was actually being proposed by those calling for compulsory, uniform and standardized education to be administered and controlled by governments through legislation and centralized controlling offices. The mistake, it is postulated, is that governments interpreted this to mean that they had to establish a system of schools, whereas, it was only intended that governments were to determine the essential core content of the curriculum and to ensure every child spent a minimum number of years in education. For instance, West believes that John Stuart Mills,

*"... despite his misgivings about the ability of ordinary people to buy education themselves, eventually confined his proposals for state intervention to a law rendering only education (not schooling) compulsory."*  
(West, 1965, p.124)

Be that as it may, by the middle of this century governmentally controlled and funded schools were the norm, yet already there was growing unrest about its nature and success.

In Denis Lawton's text, "Education and Politics in the 1990s: Conflict or Consensus?", he gives a very succinct review of the growth in anti-interventionist sentiments and calls this new ideology "Neo-liberalism". He disagrees with those who believe that such notions were derived from the ideas, or simplification of the ideas, of the eighteenth century classical economist, Adam Smith. Lawton, on the other hand, firmly believes that the major modern exponent of the free market is the Austrian economist, Hayek, who condemned socialism in his text, "The Road to Serfdom ", and saw collectivist ideas and practices as a threat to freedom and prosperity. Lawton goes on to quite importantly point out that it was Hayek who, in 1947, founded the first international Society devoted to the preservation of the non-socialist liberal order. In addition, Lawton would have us acknowledge that it was through membership and contribution

to the actions and publications of this Society that many of the British right-wing economists forged and honed their ideas. Therefore, if this is the case, then it is vital to record Lawton's interpretation of Hayek's basic premise.

*"A recurring theme in Hayek's work has been the idea that collectivist social planning is doomed to failure because society is so complex and the 'facts' that planners deal with are not concrete, but are based on human behaviour and relationships which are unpredictable. Hence, according to Hayek, the superiority of the free market over any kind of planning for full employment, a welfare state, economic targets and redistribution of income. The market mechanism is superior to all planning because it works automatically with a beautiful simplicity - if you leave it alone. The 'selfish' acts of individuals end up by being for the good of society as a whole."*

(Lawton, 1992, p.3)

Even though Hayek strongly opposed Marxist philosophy, Lawton would contend that it is ironic that his faith in the free market is based on a simple belief, shared by Marx, that the economic relationship between individuals is the dominant social relationship, but differed from Marx by adding that social theory should be based on the 'fact' and not on the desire to do good, to be generous or to put right any injustices. In the words of Lawton, this Hayek economic belief about the power of the free market over bureaucratic subjectivity and planning is stated as,

*"The price mechanism is superior to those sentiments - it is the perfect information system for the whole society, ensuring by automatic competition low costs and efficiency. Such supply and demand information could never be known to any central planning bureaucracy. The free market mechanism is superior to planning both in terms of efficiency and in terms of individual freedom. Economic freedom means social freedom. There will, of course, be 'winners and losers' as a result of the market. But we should be careful not to introduce ideas of fairness or social justice into the formula. In a free market economy there will, for example, be occasions when a poor individual will die because he cannot afford*

*expensive drugs or an operation, but that is not unfair or unjust - it is only a bit of bad luck."* (Lawton, 1992, p.4)

Consequently, Hayek and his followers would vehemently insist that the 'social justice' or 'redistributive justice' contained in legislature, and established through government controlled centralized bureaucracies, is not only meaningless but is fraudulent and harmful to freedom. It would seem that Hayek only acknowledged the need for a minimum state so as to ensure that the economic activity performed by the individuals within the particular society was completed in a fair and just manner.

This understanding by the right-wing, free market protagonists is described by Jones as,

*"Whatever is good in society comes about through the interaction of free individuals. If the state intervenes to regulate their relationship, it will produce a range of evils, that stretches from bureaucracy and economic inefficiency to totalitarian oppression. This principle applies as much to social questions as to the economic transactions of the free market which provide the inspiration for this kind of liberalism. The most efficient system, and the one which provides the greatest opportunities to the greatest number, is one which does not seek to control individual initiative."* (Jones, 1989, p.32)

In answer to those who would oppose the economic powers of the free market, because of the perceived freedom for it to be controlled by a limited number of greedy individuals, Hayekian thinking would counter with the optimistic belief that human selfishness is not a problem because it is eventually transformed into a public good. Whereas, their opponents (or as Lawton calls them, the "neo-conservative"), they would suggest, have a more pessimistic view of society derived from the seventeenth century philosopher, Hobbes, whose vision of human interaction was that of being nasty, brutish and short unless it could be tightly constrained by social rules, custom,

tradition and order . Lawton suggests that Hayekian thinking was more related, especially within the realm of education, to the thoughts of Rousseau and says,

*"Rousseau's Social Contract (1762) begins with the much quoted, but ambiguous statement : 'Men are born free, yet everywhere they are in chains'. Rousseau's view was that man was naturally good but corrupted by the social institutions imposed upon him. ... He asserted that the task of education was not to encourage conformity to society's conventions and rules, but to enhance an individual's liberty and self-expression."* (Lawton, 1992, p.12)

Thus, when applied to education, the "neo-liberals" would tend to talk about choice, competition and the free market in education, but the "neo-conservatives" would be more likely to advocate traditional values, traditional subjects, and less educational theory in the training of teachers, but greater immersion into the traditional values of good schools.

This dichotomous ideology is no more clearly illustrated than in the words of Lawton who writes,

*"It is not surprising that those who have a pessimistic view of human nature would see the functions of the state in terms of law and order, protecting property and so on, and see education much more in terms of control, stressing obedience to authority, learning traditional kinds of knowledge by rote. ... At the other extreme, Rousseau's ... child must learn for him/herself rather than be told, self-expression is more important than knowing what others have invented, creativity is given high priority and so on."* (Lawton, 1992, p.12)

Therefore, it is quite surprising to realize that, for much of the third quarter of this, the twentieth century, these two seemingly opposing views were combined in an uneasy juxtaposition within most western educational systems. It was during this time that opposition to the traditional authoritarian, subject-centred teaching methodologies gave rise to more humane, child-centred approaches. Educational psychology made a significant impact on the teacher's understanding of the individual child's stages of

development and the associated issues with respect to learning. Correspondingly, the call was being made to diversify the curriculum, in this case the range of subject offerings, so that the individual student could have choice and the freedom to select relevant and appropriate subjects related to their own interests, strengths and vocational desires.

Yet these same societies still feared lawlessness and anarchy. The Cold War was at its peak so that the people lived with a real fear of war and a possible loss of their secure and familiar society. Therefore, they had a heightened awareness of their social values and their community standards. There was generally great economic optimism and it appeared essential to maintain the status quo in order to continue this growth in wealth and propriety. Under such conditions, there was a strong commitment to propagate the desired social traits and understandings by ensuring that all of the children, regardless of their parents' social position, were properly socialized. Without exception, the school system was deemed the most effective and appropriate institution to ensure the successful achievement of these ideals.

Herein lies the dilemma. On the one hand the neo-liberal influence was affecting education but, on the other hand, the neo-conservative influence was controlling schooling. Neither group completely accepted the role of their antagonist but the unenviable amalgamation of these two opposites seemed to cater for everyone's needs. The broader curriculum and more sensitive teaching strategies appeased the adherents of the neo-liberal ethic, while the centrally controlled school system, and its ability to direct, regulate, co-ordinate and monitor general student development and socialization, satisfied those calling for a neo-conservative ethic.

Not surprisingly, by the end of the 1970s dissatisfaction and disillusionment with this type of educational structure was rife. The economic, political and social conditions had changed significantly during the previous twenty five years. Most western economies were heading into a deep recession while the eastern economies were on the brink of



collapse. The Cold War was beginning to thaw as the socialist states realized their need to embrace some form of capitalism and a free market economy beyond their own limited political liaisons. In addition, the previous ever-present fear of a nuclear holocaust was dissipating, too, as the cost of maintaining pre-eminence with nuclear weaponry became exceedingly unpopular and, seemingly, no longer necessary. The threat of a third world war appeared more unlikely.

Perhaps, more importantly though, was the evolving social dissatisfaction in the western world. Burgeoning unemployment raised doubts about the ability of the current education process to adequately prepare the students for the work place. Conservatives blamed the liberal curriculum for lowering educational standards and directing, or at least allowing, students to move away from subjects seen as being essential to industry and commerce. In addition, they also blamed the perceived increases in permissiveness and lawlessness amongst the youth on liberal ideas because, it was thought, they had created hedonistic and individualistic ideals through their progressive methods. Svi Shapiro writes about this, from the American situation, and recalls that there was a strong mobilization for a full return to the "Protestant ethic" or the "Puritan temper" and adds,

*"Such virtues had emphasized work, sobriety, frugality, sexual restraint, and a forbidding attitude towards life. Indeed, it has not been hard to suggest a link between the assertion of such values and the emergence of conservative educational demands."*

(Shapiro, 1990, p.121)

From a social perspective, some conservatives were also greatly distressed by, what they believed to be, a breakdown in the traditional social order as general education, and its ability to increase social mobility, seemed to be confusing previously established and desirable social strata.

On the other hand, liberalists argued that the ever expanding cost to the taxpayer, required to financially support an apparently ineffective, cumbersome and inefficient

bureaucracy, was beyond the bounds of acceptance. Ken Jones recounts a very clear and succinct summary of their beliefs when he writes,

*"The educational consequences of intrinsically unaccountable monopoly control were many and serious. Operating on an assured income, schools were complacent about existing practices; they failed to innovate in any constructive sense, while at the same time were all too susceptible to the political whims of teachers, some of whom found it easier to spout their political prejudices to their charges than to make the intellectual effort to master a real subject, let alone teach it. Not needing to be receptive to consumer influence, schools had developed an educational bias against the business community, while themselves being, in economic terms, highly inefficient institutions. Top heavy with administrators, overstaffed with teachers, the school system had failed to respond effectively to the new market conditions created by falling rolls. It could not be regenerated itself, since with the best will in the world, teachers still could not escape the pressures of a monopoly situation. ... The solution to this set of chronic problems lay, of course, in the market."*

(Jones, 1989, p.47)

Shapiro paints a far more damaging picture of these institutional monoliths, created to serve the people but progressively becoming far too self-edifying and narcissistic, by writing,

*"Societies which two decades ago were viewed as having solved the major issues are now seen as overwhelmed to the point of paralysis. At the centre of this paralysis is a view of the state having reached unmanageable proportions and bureaucratically out of control. ... (T)he bureaucracy has become more than unwieldy - it has become the one place to which the most impossible tasks are assigned. Where previously the market and the political process decided who got what, when, and how, the bureaucracy now decides. And caught between its political task and its depoliticized rationale ... public administration ... searches for answers to its intractable task wherever it can find them, only to discover that each possible option causes as many problems as it solves."*

*The resulting growth of new bureaus that do not solve the problems for which they were created gives rise to both an administrative and fiscal crisis. ... (T)he simultaneous need for, but despair of, bureaucracy colors the public life of our time. The consequent confusion is reinforced, rather than ameliorated, by the practices and reforms of state policy makers. As administrators struggle to gain support for their particular concerns, so the traditional distinction between politics and administration is eroded, and the latter becomes increasingly politicized. As the monopolization of firms in the private sector eliminates competition and subjects the economy to a 'thorough rationalization', bureaus within the state appear as parochial, competitive, and inefficient by capitalist criteria. The enormous disparity between the principles organizing the two sectors could not be tolerated, and the result ... was an attempt to organize public bureaus in monopolistic fashion. The resulting centralization ultimately did little more than contribute to the further stagnation of policy making. The creation of 'super-administration' units has, by a number of accounts, reduced innovation and risk taking and eliminated self-generated standards of propriety."*

(Shapiro, 1990, p.110 - 111)

Out of all this agitation, accusation, chagrin and discontent a new ideology gained support and credibility. In the somewhat controversial words of Ben Brodinsky, probably phrased more to draw attention to this new concept by creating discussion, and to induce a response, than being a really true personal perception, the birth of this new ideology in America is described in the following way;

*"Year by year the distaste grew and turned to anger. Anger turned to rage. And rage spurred many of these parents and taxpayers to band together for attacks on education. They looked for and found leaders to voice their hatred for the goals of modern public education, its methods, its tools and materials.*

*The alienated, the disappointed, and the irate gathered under the banner of an aberrant conservative movement - a movement that includes concerned mothers and fathers but is led by zealots and extremists. Some manifestations of the movement are rational. But its rabid core, now known as the New Right, has loosed the dogs of*

*war against the public schools, using the accumulated ire of some segments of the population as a justification to wage warfare against the schools for what they have done and are doing, as well as for what they are not doing that the zealots wish them to do.*

*The public schools in 1982 are the target of so powerful an attack that their very existence is in jeopardy. Radicals of the New Right are working toward exactly that end, that is, the remaking of the public schools in the image of the New Right - or else their destruction."*

(Brodinsky, October 1982, p.87)

The New Right's message regarding school and educational reform quickly became the possible panacea for the educational mistakes, mismanagement and misconceptions of the past. Bruce Cooper writes,

*"... the New Right has advanced its message. The language of 'choice', 'competition', and even the 'marketplace', is being adopted by bipartisan, often liberal, groups that a decade ago would not have been caught dead saying things like : 'Markets have proven to be very efficient instruments to allocate resources and motivate people in many sectors of American life. They can also make it possible for all public school students to gain access to equal school resources'."*

(Cooper, August 1988, p.282)

Margaret Goetz gives the following explanation for the readiness for the American people to forgo their egalitarian aspirations for a new utopia built on excellence, efficiency and choice,

*"As the post-war baby boom generation matured, reducing population pressure on the schools, education achieved fiscal stability just as political pressure for change began to expand rapidly. Today, the school-aged population is smaller, poorer and more racially and ethnically diverse. Declining test scores throughout the 1970s undermined public confidence in the country's public school system and led business leaders to question the quality of the nation's workforce. An eroding US position in the international economy turned policy makers' attention and energies to issues of efficiency,*

*choice and excellence in education and away from earlier concerns with equity."* (Mitchell & Goertz, 1990, p.1)

Boyd and Kerchner share this tenet regarding the intolerant attitude by the baby-boomer generation. They suggest,

*"A number of analysts ... argue that the maturation of the Baby-Boom generation has much to do with the dramatic reconfiguration of American politics since 1970. They stress that, unlike earlier generations influenced by the Great Depression and federal interventions to combat it, the 'boomers' grew up with affluence and a sense that big government causes problems. With their basic materialistic needs satisfied, 'boomers' seek self-actualization and inner directedness. According to Lee Atwater ... one way this manifests itself is with a concern for quality: 'Bigger is not better any more - better is better'. Consequently, 'boomers' desire excellence and choice in schooling and may be sceptical of the ability of bureaucratized, government schools to deliver these qualities."*

(Boyd & Kerchner, 1988, p.3)

However, they also give their account of the growth in general support for the convictions previously assigned to the followers of the New Right.

*"Demands for greater efficiency, productivity, and quality, and sometimes even for privatization of public services have become common-place. Social and demographic trends frequently are adding to pressures in this direction by eroding middle and upper-middle class support for public services. ...*

*The pursuit of excellence has replaced equity as the leading goal of American schooling. Although some policy-makers and analysts claim equity need not be sacrificed in the pursuit of excellence, many critics feel that beneath the rhetoric of excellence there is an over-riding concern for economic efficiency and productivity."*

(Boyd & Kerchner, 1988, p.1)

Most authors have chosen to elaborate upon the perceived failure of the educational system when describing the call for change and the rise of the New Right, however,

Boyd and Kerchner, while not denying these explanations, do add one more positive suggestion.

*"As the educational level of families rises they tend to become more sophisticated, discerning, and demanding consumers of educational services. Schools are thus under pressure in part because of their very successes. Each generation tends to demand more from the schools than their predecessors. This makes the public, and especially the very highly educated upper-middle class, increasingly quality conscious and unwilling to accept mediocre schooling services."* (Boyd & Kerchner, 1988, p.3)

However, the author who struck a chord with my sentiments and, thereby, has influenced my own personal attitude towards the New Right is Michael Apple. In an article entitled, "The Politics of Official Knowledge in the United States", published in the Journal of Curriculum Studies, I believe he makes a very telling summary of the whole gambit of issues associated with the new reforms. Apple not only recounts what is being suggested but also underlines what is being lost within the changes and who are the losers. These factors are often overlooked. Apple writes,

*"The public debate on education, and on all things social, has shifted profoundly to the right. The effects of this shift can be seen in a number of educational policies and proposals now gaining momentum throughout the (USA) . ... What has been partly accomplished has been a successful translation of an economic doctrine into the language of experience, moral imperative, and common sense. A free market ethic is being combined with a populist politics. This has meant the blending together of a 'rich mix' of themes that have a long history ... -nation, family, duty, authority, standards and traditionalism - with other thematic elements that have struck a resonant chord during a time of crisis. These latter themes include self interest, competitive individualism, and anti-government rhetoric.*

*The rightist and neo-conservative movement has entered into education in part as the social democratic goal of expanding equality of opportunity has lost much of its political potency and its ability to*

*mobilize people. The 'panic' over falling standards and illiteracy, the fears of violence in schools, the concern with the destruction of family values and religiosity, all have an effect. These fears are used by culturally and economically dominant groups to move the arguments about education into their own arena, an arena of standardization, productivity, a romanticized past when all children sat still with their hands folded and learned a common curriculum, and so on. Since so many parents are justifiably concerned about the economic and social future of their children - in an economy that is increasingly conditioned by lower wages, the threat of unemployment, and cultural and economic insecurity - the neo-conservative and rightist positions connect well with the fears of many people.*

*One of the conservatives movement's major successes has been to marginalize a number of voices in education and in the government at most levels. The voices of the economically disadvantaged, of many women, of people of color, and so many others are hard to hear over the din of the attacks on the school for its inefficiency, its lack of connection to an economy, and its failure to teach 'real knowledge'.*

(Apple, 1990, p.378)

The basic precepts advanced by the New Right's message of choice, competition, free market forces, excellence and efficiency were manifested in more tangible changes to the previously accepted processes within public education. Of central importance amongst all the changes is the dismantling of the central and regional bureaucracies and the devolution of control and management back to the individual school. In essence, the privatization of the public schools. Associated with this move would be the direct payment of the educational funds to the families so that they could use it to purchase the education of their choice from the school of their choice. That is, the schools would be free to develop their own learning environment as they saw fit and, if this proved valuable enough and suitable enough to individual families, they would receive the necessary funds to maintain their particular programme from the families supporting their educational initiatives. A common term used to describe this somewhat complex transferal of funds is the "voucher system". Although there are some slight variations to

the manner by which this may occur, each system involves a process whereby the government equally distributing the educational budgetary funds to each family in the form of a voucher, the family then decides which school best suits their child's needs, and, on attending the school, they pass on their voucher which, in turn, is redeemed to the government for money. Obviously, the more attractive the school, and its educational programme, the more students it will attract and, so, the more government funding it will receive. On the other hand, schools poorly managed, or administered with little imagination, initiative, and attention to students' needs, will not be attended by sufficient students and will eventually close, thereby, ensuring that the limited government fiscal support is not continually being wasted to maintain an ineffectual or inefficient school. Bruce Cooper summarizes this tenet by saying,

*"Each school would be self-governing and presumably, be more responsive and competitive - pressed onward to excellence by local markets."*  
(Cooper, August 1988, p.291)

At the very bottom of this New Right thought is the belief that more money will not create better education, but better school leadership will. Therefore, these reformers strongly support the giving of sufficient autonomy and resources directly to the schools and, with high staff and community involvement in the running of the school, improvement will occur. But, of course, they are not as optimistic enough to allow this to happen in isolation and without accountability.

This is the next key concept - accountability, and it would be found on two levels. At the local level the school would be accountable to its own community, while on a national level the school would be accountable to the government through its ministerial department. In this way, the school would have to be producing and maintaining an appropriate educational programme, as determined by the people with students attending the school, but also, it would have to be seen to be addressing and abiding by national standards and expectations of quality, excellence and specificity in its curriculum. It is important to recall that the New Right movement grew out of a disillusionment with



educational standards and liberal curricula, such that, they would not countenance schools having the freedom to teach how and what they liked. As Ken Jones suggests,

*"(The New Right) does, however, intend that the pace and the content of change should be shaped by state intervention. In education this entails the belief that the content of the curriculum is far too important to be left to the autonomy of the individual school."*

(Jones, 1989, p.79)

Therefore, associated issue, including a national curriculum, core subjects, teacher appraisal and school accreditation, have been linked to these new reforms.

Having gained an overview of the factors influencing the emergence of the New Right reforms to education, and then reviewing the general principles of this ideology, it now becomes important to see the effects of these changes within a particular system. In addition, it would seem prudent to investigate more than one system since one could suggest that common traits would tend to highlight essential tenets and, hence, deepen our understanding of the implications of adopting this reform. Also, it could be argued that some localized idiosyncrasies could marginally alter the manner and nature of the adoption of the New Right programme, and so, it would be best to compare two or more such systems. Therefore, I will now review the method of introduction of the New Right reforms on the educational systems of Britain and the United States of America, and highlight some of their presumed significant effects.

## CHAPTER 5

# **The New Right's Impact on Britain's Educational System**

A review of literature dealing with the experiences of educational change in Britain following the adoption of a New Right strategy.

In reflecting on the process of change to the British educational system and the demise of the 1944 Education Act, which had enshrined comprehensive education into British society, most commentators credit the then Labour Prime Minister, Mr. James Callaghan, as firing the first salvo when he made his now infamous Ruskin College speech in October of 1976. Brian Simon believes that Callaghan had been greatly influenced by the "oil crisis" of the mid 1970s and the vitriolic public criticism of the educational system that this crisis created.

*"But the immediacy - indeed suddenness - of the crisis that shook this country, together with others, forced a search for a scapegoat. Industrialists, whose confidence was shaken, turned on the schools. These, it was claimed, were failing to produce young people with the skills required by industry. It was not industry or industrialists that were at fault; still less the economic and financial system as a whole. It was the schools - and, it followed, the teachers and the local authorities responsible for local systems. So a widespread attack, and critique, was mounted." (Simon, 1988, p.21)*

Although Simon contends that Callaghan was more intent on mouthing the thoughts and ideas of others, particularly industrialists, economists and influential right-wing politicians, his call for governmental intervention into the school curriculum, particularly in secondary education, became a springboard for future moves in this direction. The belief was that the government had become too distant from what was actually happening in the schools and that the real power, control and influence over education, particularly the curriculum, was centred in the bureaucracies originally created to implement the government's desires. These bureaucracies, the Local Education Authorities, were generally accepted as being the actual directing authority over all educational matters including the management of schools, the distribution of funds and resources, and the nature of the curriculum. Brooks highlights this aspect about Callaghan's speech,

*"Callaghan's Ruskin College speech testifies to the growing interest of central government in the school curriculum. While he was cautious not to make an explicit reference to government direction of the curriculum, it was difficult to believe - given his diagnosis of the problems confronting education and the general drift of his thinking about how they should be resolved - that he was not envisaging some kind of increased central government involvement"*

(Brooks, 1991, p.6)

Brooks adds support to this perception by quoting some phrases from this speech.

*"Callaghan was insistent that there should be no 'holy cows' in education, that there should be no areas that 'profane hands' were not 'allowed to touch'."*

(Brooks, 1991, p.6)

Lawton (1993) would add that the Ruskin speech also publicly raised the question of a core curriculum for the first time.

Following this speech, the "Great Debate", to which Callaghan's speech was a prelude, took up the issue of justifying increased government involvement in the running of education. In addition, Shirley Williams, Callaghan's Education Secretary, advanced the suggestion of a core curriculum in the 1977 Green Paper, "Education in Schools", and in the Department of Education and Science Circular, "LEA Arrangements for the School Curriculum". One can clearly see that the wheels of change were beginning to turn.

Although there were no more specific actions by the Labour Government to change the nature of the educational system in Britain in the ensuing years leading up to the 1979 elections, Lawton (1993) indicates there were some bureaucratic and professional pressures from within the Department of Education and Science, itself, to implement some kind of national curriculum. However, the defeat of the incumbent government, by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party, curtailed any natural evolution of such changes and heralded the commencement of a decade of dramatic reform. From the

beginnings of the Thatcher government in 1979 until 1993 there were to be six Secretaries of State for Education; an unfortunately high frequency of change in personnel for a ministry implementing fundamental reforms in its area of responsibility. One would have to question the wisdom of some facets of the changes, and the relatively rapid speed of the changes, in such circumstances. It could be construed that some of these changes were requested for personal ministerial gain rather than for sound educational advancement.

Again, I refer to Lawton (1993) for a clear and succinct overview of the respective influence and changes implemented during the time of each of the Secretaries of State for Education.

*"(1) Mark Carlisle (1979 - 1981) apparently showed little interest in the idea of a National Curriculum, and spent his time struggling to retain a reasonable share of the diminishing Public Expenditure and carving out enough money for the Assisted Places Scheme which enabled some "bright" children to have subsidised places in private schools.*

*(2) Keith Joseph (1981 - 1986) was ideologically opposed to the idea of a national curriculum which was, however, raised for discussion in his time.*

*(3) Kenneth Baker (1986 - 1989) was the enthusiast for and the driving force behind the National Curriculum. He seized upon the idea eagerly and wanted results quickly. But the haste was unfortunate. And Baker did not have the chance of putting his plan into operation : he was "promoted" in 1989 to be Chairman of the Conservative Party.*

*(4) John McGregor (1989 - 1990) was left with the job of implementation. He was beginning to appreciate the difficulties and the complexities involved [just before] he moved on.*

*(5) Kenneth Clarke (1990- 1992) who favoured commonsense simplicity rather than educational theory. He used education to demonstrate his right-wing credentials.*

*(6) John Patten (1992 - ?) has made noises about the importance of religious education and moral training in the curriculum, but his*

*bandwagon appears to be encouraging all schools to opt out from LEA control."*  
(Lawton, 1993, p.3)

Most commentators would see the Baker era as producing the greatest and most telling reforms to Britain's educational system. Although the abolition of the Schools Council and its replacement by two government controlled bodies, the Secondary Examinations Council and the Schools Curriculum Development Committee, in 1984, had marked the beginning of the distancing of teachers from control of the curriculum, it was the 1988 Education Reform Act introduced into parliament by one of its key authors, Kenneth Baker, which clearly heralded the beginning of government rather than professional control of education. Brooks points out,

*"Though Kenneth Baker, the author of the Act, argued that his reforms were 'not about enhancing state control', but were 'educational' and not concerned with 'the distribution of power', many teachers in the 1980s and 1990s believed that they represented a significant shift of power in curricular matters away from them to the Secretary of State for Education. Their duties as laid down by the 1988 Act seem to provide conclusive evidence in favour of the latter view."*  
(Brooks, 1991, p.7)

Of course, there were many other legislative components of this Bill which underlined its enormous impact on the educational system. First, it proposed the need to devolve much of the financial responsibility for the running of each individual school, or at least all secondary schools and all primary schools with more than 200 pupils, to the school's own governing council. It was envisaged that each school should become self-managing and more independent while at the same time loosening the control of the Local Education Authorities over individual school practices and administration.

Secondly, the Bill also proposed that all schools should observe a policy of "open enrollment". Previously the Local Education Authority (LEA) had the power to establish an upper limit on each school's student intake. They had introduced this procedure in order to facilitate a more even distribution of the ever reducing general student

population and to ensure the continued existence of schools by preventing the more desirable schools from absorbing students from other nearby but less popular schools. It also allowed the LEA to have the ability to plan for the contraction of their school system by having control over student enrollments and, thereby, preventing schools destined for closure from endeavouring to attract more students. Under the new proposal, schools had the right to admit as many students as parents wished to send them, and so be permitted to expand considerably. Conversely, unpopular schools would falter and ultimately close unless they were able to alter their reputation and reverse their enrollment trends.

Thirdly, government schools were given permission to charge fees for certain activities. Mr. Baker took pains to rectify a potential politically damaging statement by his Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, who, just prior to an election, indicated that the objective of this clause in the Bill was to allow publicly maintained schools to charge fees. It was Mr. Baker's contention that this was not the case, but rather, to allow these schools to collect fees for "extras" such as visits to residential field centres, sporting and cultural centres, and curriculum enhancement excursions. However, Simon asserts,

*"But today many schools, in more affluent areas, do make charges covering essential materials and equipment and the clear danger is that such charges will also be legitimised by the Bill.*

*In some local authority areas, charges covering essential materials are already permitted. But to legalise the process through a new statute is an entirely different matter. Clearly this fits into the general strategy very precisely. Popular schools in affluent areas will be permitted to charge such fees, as will others of course; but this will provide such schools with the opportunity further to differentiate themselves from the ordinary run of schools, and to some extent to narrow their clientele to the more affluent section of the local population. So now such schools are poised for break-out."*

(Simon, 1988, p.50)

This last sentence brings us to the final aspect of the Education Reform Act - the availability of a process by which schools, or at least their controlling Council, can choose to withdraw from the governmentally controlled system. They would still receive the general grants from the government but this would be paid directly to the school and not via the local authority. In the words of Margaret Thatcher, such schools would become "state independent schools". Ostensibly, the rationale for this proposal was to allow parents to have a greater input into the quality and nature of their school's educational programme and to broaden the range of choices for schools within the state education system. Needless to say, one cannot help but to see that it would also be a very telling factor in the demise of the local authority structure, particularly if the 'opting out' choice became a popular alternative for schools; an outcome not contrary to the wishes of the Conservative Party. Stewart Ranson highlights this objective of the reforms by saying,

*"By the 1980s ... the LEAs had become the focus of critical analysis from particular groups in society. The pamphleteers of the Conservative New Right, ... the Adam Smith Institute, and the Institute of Economic Affairs, and the Hillgate Group have argued that educational standards have been in decline and much of the blame lies with the LEAs who have encouraged poor management, remote bureaucracy, denied public choice and prevented due accountability to parents and employers. The LEA, it is proposed, is no longer required, because schools can fulfil its traditional functions, or if it is, only in a limited vestigial form."*

(Ranson, 1992, p.2)

All of these reforms had pampered to the wishes of the New Right. There was a definite emphasis on choice, competition and the free market, while, at the same time, the process for dismantling the power and influence of the local authority bureaucracies was set in place. Yet there were still key elements to be addressed. Central to the ideology of the New Right was the call for excellence and accountability. These tenets had the potential to raise quite a deal of unrest within a reform promoting devolution of



power, authority and control to individual schools. Obviously, it became essential for the Thatcher government to implement some strategy or process for ensuring high standards of education, adequate commitment to the core curriculum, and the proper use of funds and resources.

In response to this pressure, the Conservative Party introduced a new national assessment system designed to ensure accountability while also promising more market competition. The parameters of this universal assessment system were set so that it could deliver data which, in turn, could be used to demonstrate the relative degree of efficiency and standard of performance of each state school. It was envisaged that the test scores obtained from this assessment system could be used competitively to rank each school according to the achievements of their students, and so, supply prospective parents with yet another piece of valuable information to assist them in the choice of school for their child. Again, the premise was that good schools, with effective teachers, would attract more students thereby advantaging more students than they had previously been able to due to the Local Education Authorities restrictions on enrollments. Conversely, bad schools, with ineffective teachers, would lose students and eventually close and, thereby, would no longer be disadvantaging the students who had previously been forced to attend this particular school.

In spite of initial attempts to create an imaginative new system of testing, the political emphasis on time limits and deadlines rendered a promising initiative as being futile. Even though some testing procedures were welcomed as positive and constructive innovations, others were judged as failures. Consequently, the Secretary of State for Education curtailed this lengthy process and forced the adoption of more traditional testing procedures. These, it was proposed, were to occur for students aged seven, eleven, fourteen and sixteen.

Although all of these reforms grew out of a popular and widespread disgruntled air what has replaced the previous system is also highly and widely criticized. First, there

is a strong body of thought which deplores the unacceptable departure from appropriate democratic practice in the lack of consultation, particularly with educational professionals, on many of the vital educational issues. In particular, the legislation, which authorizes the Secretary of State to appoint a National Curriculum Council to advise on the entire content of teaching, is widely irksome and a continual source of irritation and tension throughout the education community. This Act virtually removed direct input by educationists and teachers into any significant debate, or process, centred on national education issues.

An associated issue to this is the demoralizing imposition, from above, of a national curriculum. This is said (Simon, 1988) to have created a significant decrease in teacher and local authority initiative where much of the processes of curriculum development had previously been occurring. The loss of this chance for creative and stimulating work, it is argued, is a source of frustration, distress and disenchantment within the teaching fraternity.

Another cause of concern is the prevailing academicism of the national curriculum. Not only are the core subjects limited to those perceived to be more rigorous or essential, at the expense of some of the more practical and vocational subjects, but the loss or downgrading of others, such as Latin and Religion, has also caused pockets of outrage.

Simon raises what I consider to be the two major concerns within these new reforms when he reports,

*"A particular cause for disquiet is the lack of attention to the 'special educational needs' of pupils who suffer from learning difficulties, or handicaps, of one kind or another - sometimes a combination of several. Specialists in this area warn that the proposals tabled for these pupils may result 'in the very state that they are designed to remedy'".*

(Simon, 1988, p.120)

Later, he goes on to add,

*"The most profound hostility ... has been registered towards mass testing of all children from about seven, and at eleven, fourteen and sixteen. There is, of course, experience of what this means especially among teachers. Even those too young to have had personal experience have heard what was the effect of the procedures involved, for this has entered deeply into the folklore of every school. Parents have also learned what 'the 11-plus' meant. No one wants a repetition of this experience which was so profoundly harmful to children and their education - as the government well understands. "*

(Simon, 1988, p.122)

Since the regular use of standardized tests became a contentious, but vital, component of the British, New Right reforms in education, a brief review of their legitimacy for this task seems worthwhile. Norman Gronlund points out,

*"Despite their high technical quality, standardized achievement tests (should) complement rather than replace teachers' informal classroom tests"*

(Gronlund, 1976, p.313)

Later, he clarifies this broad perception by adding,

*"(Standardized achievement tests) are of little value for measuring learning outcomes unique to a particular course, the day-to-day progress of pupils, and knowledge of current developments in rapidly changing fields. ... Standardized tests measure only a portion of the knowledge, skills, and developmental abilities needed to evaluate, predict, or diagnose learning progress."*

(Gronlund, 1976,

p.313)

This belief is also supported by Wiles and Bondi who suggest that the proper evidence for a comprehensive view of student achievement is "multidimensional" and should include,

*"... supplementing standardized tests with samples of student work, teacher observations, and other such measures of growth."*

(Wiles and Bondi, 1979, p.259)

William Schubert supports this “multidimensional” perception and writes,

*“Many aspects of learning cannot be measured, but they can be realized by the insightful, experienced intuition and perception of teachers.”*  
(Schubert, 1986, p.262)

However, Schubert also offers a more philosophical criticism of achievement tests and says,

*“The widespread use of achievement (tests) is often a substitute for thinking seriously about purposes. The test publishers define achievement for us. Thus, it is not a construct that we create, but one that we receive or buy. When no purposes are clearly articulated and implemented, achievement tests are purchased and administered, and the categories of performance on the test printout simply become the curriculum purposes. This preempts consideration of other possible ends of curricular endeavours...”*  
(Schubert, 1986, p.204)

Clearly, Schubert is highlighting the deterministic function of such tests. Since their results are used as an extremely influential factor in determining continued governmental and parental support, they can not be ignored or downgraded in importance. Thus, they become an ‘end’ in themselves as schools decide to teach to ensure success in these tests rather than for other more worthy and beneficial educational outcomes. Furthermore, the imposition of this somewhat simplistic goal reduces the need for a more in-depth and cyclical review of the curriculum, within a school, to ensure its continual suitability and relevance to the school community it serves. This, in turn, further removes the teacher from utilizing their knowledge and experience in more rewarding and fulfilling professional activities and, possibly, increasing their sense of disenchantment and disillusionment with education at large.

Grondlund raises another detrimental factor for teachers, who are forced to accept the imposition of achievement tests upon their curriculum. First, it is important to note that Grondlund is not against such tests, per se, but wishes to recognize and acknowledge their limitations in an endeavour to ensure their proper and relevant use. As a

consequence, his constructive criticisms must surely warrant deeper consideration.

Thus, his views regarding the essential participatory function of teachers, in the use of achievement tests, is worth noting.

*“Although standardized tests can serve a variety of administrative and guidance functions, of central concern to any testing program is the effective use of test results in evaluating and improving the educational development of pupils. It is for this important reason that teachers participate in the selection of the standardized tests. Their doing so provides greater assurance that tests are in harmony with the instructional objectives of the school, and that the results will serve the various instructional uses for which they are intended.”*

(Grondlund, 1976, p.357)

Again, this raises the concept of specificity of the test results or, conversely, their significant limitation as a means for making general comparisons of schools throughout a system. Of equal importance is Grondlund's contention that teachers should be involved in the selection of tests in order to increase their accuracy or relevance. Yet, in the new British system, there were deliberate actions taken by the government to remove, or at least limit, the involvement of educational professionals in the selection, development and implementation of the strategy to utilize standardized achievement tests as the prime means for generating comparative data on schools and, thereby, determining their relative quality as educational institutions.

Therefore, it is quite understandable that, today, the reliability, validity and credibility of such imposed testing procedures would raise the deepest concerns amongst educationalists anywhere in the world. When one contemplates the additional use of their results, for the determination of the quality of teaching and the categorizing of a school's relative performance, one can envisage the magnification, a hundredfold, of all the ambiguities and vagaries which had plagued the use of such tests when applied only to school groups or even to individuals.

The ambitious ideal of decentralizing the management of schools also created a great deal of concern. Parents and local people were not used to this responsibility and many schools lacked the expertise within the local community to assume such an important task. Geoffrey Burkhardt emphasizes this major concern in his article, "Parents Power in UK Schools - The Increased Role and Responsibility of School Governors", in the August 1991 edition of the Unicorn, where he says,

*"Because of the great additional responsibility devolving to these governing bodies following the Education Acts, the issue has arisen as to whether the parent or 'lay' governors are adequately equipped to make decisions about the selection and employment of teachers; the assessment and appraisal of staff; the financial management of the school; and the oversight of the introduction of the new national curriculum in schools in England and Wales. The problem of training courses for school governors, especially for parent members of these bodies, is one currently confronting local education authorities."*

(Burkhardt, Unicorn, August 1991)

It would appear to me that much of the continued existence of the New Right reforms in education in Britain will depend upon the Government ensuring that the deficiencies in administrative skills, as just outlined, are overcome - but at what cost?

Burkhardt's comment also raises another interesting point when he suggests that it is the local education authorities who are attending to the development of these abilities in the local personnel now elected onto the school councils. It would seem, and this is supported by Ranson (p.4), that the LEAs have not only survived but have re-established their vital role within their regional education. Although their responsibilities have changed, their ability to assume other essential tasks have ensured their longevity.

## CHAPTER 6

# **The New Right's Impact on The United States of America's Educational System**

A review of literature dealing with the experiences of educational change in the United States following the adoption of a New Right strategy.

America had not escaped the global economic deterioration of the early 1980s, such that, its educational reform agenda of this decade was similarly dominated by economic concerns such as: a declining US competitiveness in the international economy; a lowering of industrial productivity; and changes in the skill level, and the size and composition of the nation's labour force. Employers were decrying the lack of adequate preparation by the public schools of the school leavers. It was widely accepted that the American students lacked the necessary reading, writing, mathematical and problem-solving skills required in the increasingly complex work place. Spring writes,

*"In the early 1980s, the Carnegie Corporation was concerned about the faltering American educational system which, according to the critics, was causing the U.S. economy to fall behind those of West Germany and Japan. Thus, the primary issue was to shore up a failing capitalist economy by producing a better-educated labor force in the schools."*

(Spring, 1988, p.11)

Under such social perceptions it would not seem too surprising that the 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, entitled "A Nation at Risk", produced empirical research data to support the understanding that, in certain key academic areas, the American students' performance lagged well behind most of its industrial competitors. Although this seemed only to consolidate the general public perception, its findings devastated the nation and became a rallying point for reform. An apparently ineffectual education system, which people thought should be improved, now became a floundering educational system which had to be improved. Guthrie and Koppich suggest,

*"President Reagan was quick to recognize the significance of "A Nation at Risk" and the intense public concern it had awakened. He made repeated statements regarding the importance of renewed educational rigor to the nation's future. He admonished state and local officials, as well as parents and educators, to make the changes necessary to restore America's schools to their past levels of prominence. He was careful to specify, however, that the financial*



*burden of reform, if there was any, should be borne by states and localities. In fact, he made clear his view that the dilution of academic and disciplinary standards was in substantial measure a consequence of prior intervention and overly intense regulatory efforts by federal officials."* (Boyd & Kerchner, 1988, p.29)

Before examining the New Right reforms which were to follow this outcry, it may be important to examine the more general implications of their political instigation. It is very interesting to note that Joel Spring begins his text book, on the politics of the American education system, by suggesting,

*"The politics of education in the United States involves a complex interrelationship among government administrators, interest groups, politicians, and knowledge brokers. The educational system is given dynamic force by each group's pursuit of a particular set of educational interests. A major result of this dynamic force is an educational system in a constant state of change. ...  
In American life, education is a religion of hope for creating a better life. People believe in the power of the schools to do good. A politician can use educational issues to gain votes..."*

(Spring , 1988, p.1)

It may also be worth noting that the general policies of the Reagan administration leading up to the "Nation at Risk" era had represented a most serious assault on the welfare state. By the middle of 1981, congressional approval had been obtained to slash \$140 billion from the social welfare programmes for the coming years, 1982 to 1984. Of this fiscal reduction, more than half of it had been pruned from the income maintenance programmes that provided low income people with cash, food, health care, and low cost housing. In the field of education, federal expenditure for 1984 was set at a lower level than that spent in 1981.

Accepting that, in the American political environment of the mid 1980s, there existed a traditionally strong and acute interest in educational issues, a popular desire to see change in the educational system, the well established vote winning ability of acceptable

stances on educational matters, and a government strongly committed to reducing its welfare responsibilities, it is very illuminating to see the course of action taken on the issue of educational reform by the Reagan administration.

David Clark and Terry Astuto contend that President Reagan held very strong beliefs about education. They summarize what they believe to be his basic premise as,

*"Education was failing; federal involvement made a bad situation worse; state and local educational officials would fix what was wrong if they were not burdened by the federal presence..."*

(Mitchell & Goertz, 1990, p.13)

Clark and Astuto go on to discuss how these views were able to dramatically alter the language of the federal educational policy. A number of new policies and pronouncements, which emanated from the office of the Secretary of Education, William Bennett, enabled the Reagan government to almost completely revamp the educational values which had previously guided education. Some of these value changes were: from equity to excellence and improved standards of performance, from needs and access to ability and selectivity, from social and welfare concerns to economic and productivity concerns, from the common school to parental choice and institutional competition, from regulations and enforcement to deregulation, from federal interventions to state and local initiatives, and from the diffusion of innovations to exhortation and information sharing.

A very significant factor in the rapid and wide acceptance of these reforms was the character, leadership style and rhetorical ability of William Bennett, himself. Bennett's masterful oratory and debating skills enabled him to publicize, diffuse and gain acceptance of the government's plans by little else than popular and powerful public speeches. So confident was Bennett, in the power and success of this unusual but inexpensive technique, that he openly boasted of using his office as a "bully pulpit" and it caused

some observers to suggest that the Reagan administration managed to reform schools "without half trying".

More specific reform actions introduced by Bennett included a core curriculum, which emphasized the humanities in the context of Western civilizations while ignoring those associated with many of the ethnic minority groups within the United States, much to their anger and frustration. In addition, this new curriculum increased the quality and number of science and mathematics courses.

Secondly, a controversial system of comparing the academic performance of all students throughout all 50 states was also introduced. This performance appraisal system became known as the "Wall Chart" and, although many state leaders initially complained bitterly about the unfair and inappropriate comparisons which originated from this chart, the system remained. Through this competitive system, the federal ambition was to create and stimulate excellence in performance and a means of assisting parents to make a choice about which school to send their child .

Having gained popular approval and relatively wide support for these reforms from amongst the fifty states, the Reagan administration then set about, what Samuel Bacharach (1990) calls, the "second wave" of educational reforms. This followed the 1986 report from the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy. This report called for the restructuring of the schools to provide a more professional environment; the restructuring of the nature of the teaching force; a revision of the recruitment, education, and induction of teachers; the making of salaries and career opportunities more market competitive; the relating of teacher and school administrator's incentives to the particular school's academic performance; and the provision of the necessary technology, services, and support staff needed for improved teacher productivity. Naturally, the teacher unions, teachers, and education profession found some implications of this report quite abhorrent and actively resisted their implementation. This reaction had two unfortunate consequences. First, it caused reluctance amongst

most states to adopt this round of reforms so that the more positive aspects of the report were largely ignored, and secondly, it enabled the federal office to distance this obviously antagonistic professional group from contributing towards the analysis and introduction of the reforms.

A very important part of the reform platform for Bennett, and his federal administration, was to take the authority away from the professional educators supposedly on the basis that they had had their opportunity but had failed to ensure a proper and effective educational system and, thereby, placed the 'nation at risk'. Naturally, this presented a profound conceptualization of mistrust and no confidence in the work of teachers, school administrators, and curriculum scholars at universities. Bennett viewed them as being a part of the problem rather than a part of the solution. So, in spite of overwhelming literature to the contrary in regard to the successful implementation of organizational change, the federal initiative was to introduce a 'top-down' strategy. This not only marginalized the education profession, but also ignored the need for a fundamental restructuring of the career and incentive paths for teachers and school administrators, so that, real change and improvement in the performance of the public schools was greatly handicapped.

Michael Apple, in his somewhat facetious but perceptive style, not only highlights the technique used by the Government but also raises the questions of their motives and their understanding of what constitutes 'real knowledge'. However, these matters perhaps go beyond the scope of this dissertation and I do not intend to follow these to their ends. Be that as it may, Apple suggests,

*"... during the years that saw a resurgence of discipline centred curriculum, Government, industry, and scientifically and technically orientated academics formed an alliance that attempted to radically shift curriculum to 'real knowledge', that housed in the discipline based departments at major universities. Since most teachers and curriculum workers were perceived to not have the capabilities to deal with such 'real knowledge', it became clear that this alliance, if*

*it was to be effective, had to select the knowledge and organize it in particular ways. The National Defence Education Act, the massive curriculum development efforts that produced so much teacher-proof material, and the boxes upon boxes of standardized kits that still often line the walls of schools and classrooms stand witness to these attempts.*

*There are few better examples of the deskilling of a field than this. If curricula are purchased ... if all curricula came ready made, largely teacher-proofed, and already linked to pre-tests and post-tests, why would teachers need the skills of curriculum deliberation? Of what use were those increasingly isolated curriculum scholars, unattached to 'real disciplines' and housed primarily in schools of education, when what counts as legitimate knowledge is already largely predetermined by its disciplinary matrix?"*

(Apple, Journal of Curriculum Studies, 1990, p.379)

In concluding this chapter, it may be worth noting Boyd's observation that, in spite of all the rhetoric and

*"...the ballyhoo and touting regarding the sweeping reforms being launched and successfully implemented across the states, the truth is that there may be less real reform occurring than meets the eye."*

(Bacharach, 1990, p.47)

Plank supports this observation of limited success of the Bennett initiatives by saying,

*"Moreover, the reforms that have been widely adopted do not generally offer incentives for innovations and differentiation among schools and school districts, but instead impose further standardization. Such changes tend to advance an equalizing agenda rather than one dedicated to 'excellence'. The recent shift in rhetoric may be important in itself, or it may portend a more significant shift in politics in the future, but to date the consequences of the new rhetoric have been smaller than has often been asserted."*

(Boyd & Kerchner, 1988, p.148)

The lasting legacy of Reagan's New Right educational reforms is the significant divesting of financial responsibility from the federal government onto the shoulders of

state and local authorities, the establishment of a federally controlled and highly specific, and academic, core curriculum, and a very competitive public school system of academic accountability.

What, then, has been learnt about the New Right educational reform movement ? The following chapter draws together the two reform experiences from Britain and the United States of America for direct comparison. Through a process of synthesizing out the common actions and outcomes of these two quite distinctively different governments, it is anticipated that one will gain a more precise picture of what this ideology really entails. It is then possible to make more valid, logical and relevant judgements about its suitability for application to education.

## CHAPTER 7

# **A Critical Assessment of the New Right Ideology**

A comparative review of the British and United States initiatives in order to highlight differences or similarities so that a deeper understanding of the New Right ideology can be gleaned and a critical assessment made of it.

Having now completed a review of the New Right's impact on the respective educational systems of Britain and the United States of America, a comparative reflection on each of their main thrusts and outcomes is warranted. In this way, one could argue that similarities underline the essential tenets, which must surely be at the heart of this ideology, but differences would distinguish optional tenets, which may simply be political and cultural preferences rather than ideological imperatives.

Both Britain and the United States diagnosed their problems in a similar way and came up with almost an identical answer, shift power and resources from the bureaucracy to the schools, from 'systems' to parents, from politicians to school councils, from the centre to the locality. Their ultimate aim was to break up the monopolistic systems and to let the families select schools of their choice irrespective of the distance they live from the school. Also, the schools were to compete for enrollments so that the worst schools would close, the mediocre ones would get better, and the best would maintain their excellence. In Britain it went even further than this. Here, schools could even choose to opt out of the system into the market place, just like an independent school, where they could compete, thrive and expand without undue interference from the system.

The leading differences between these two reform movements has mainly been in their manner and success of implementation. In many ways this can be traced to the differing political structures within these two countries. In Britain, the national government has total power and control over local schools, whereas in the United States, the President's administration does not have this direct influence which is the responsibility of each individual State. Consequently, the Thatcher government would have been able to clearly identify specific bureaucracies for attack, while the Reagan government could not. Hence, the British reforms were direct, obvious, widespread and relatively immediate. But, the American reforms were less distinct, more uncertain about which bureaucracies would be affected, slow in being implemented and far less general in their successful adoption. In fact, some educational commentators, like Cooper (1990),



contend that the two "waves" of the American reforms were almost the opposite in nature.

*"The first wave of reform, then, was flowing nearly opposite to, or even against, the second wave, centralization to decentralization, external standards to market pressures, greater regulation of curriculum and test standards to greater reliance on choice and competition."*  
(Cooper, 1990, p.138)

Another aspect of the respective political structures, which would have contributed to a part of this variation, is the fact that Mrs. Thatcher became Prime Minister, in no small way, through the dissatisfaction of the people for the previous Labour Government. Her very large majority gave her added confidence and the means to attack the many institutional structures, which had been established by the Labour Government. The education system was seen as one of the systems which reflected many Labour ideals and was, therefore, a prime target. On the other hand, Mr. Reagan's own Republican Party faced a stronger Democratic majority in the Congress and, therefore, had no mandate to introduce radical reforms.

However, the results in both countries have been remarkably similar. Some bureaucracies have been dissolved, most notably being the Inner London Educational Authority, and a greater number of parents are choosing their schools more selectively and carefully. In both Britain and the United States, more and more school administrators and teachers are commanding greater control over their own resources. The New Right reforms are taking effect in these two major countries.

Clearly, there are significant similarities in the educational changes which have taken place in Victoria and those in these two countries, particularly Great Britain. In fact, the British and Victorian situations are remarkably similar. Not only did each of these governments take office after the displacement of a Labour Government, and with an enormous popular support following widespread economic disenchantment, but they also quickly set about dismantling the bureaucratic administrative structure of their

education systems. Most notably, each of these two governments introduced the same pivotal educational initiatives, these being, the self-management of the government schools through local school councils and the concentration on the concept of consumer choice as the pivotal aspect for continued financing of each school and, hence, for the ongoing improvement and existence of the schools. This perspective gives some credibility to the belief that if the British educational initiatives are deemed to be New Right changes then those occurring in Victoria are also likely to be aligned to the same ideology.

This being the case, it seems prudent to further review and analyze these British and American changes in order to learn more about their true nature. One could be lulled into assuming that these reforms have been fairly well adopted, albeit with some minor resistance and reluctance, without too great a negative impact on education and society at large. At this point, then, it may be worth taking some time to reflect on some of the perceived problems associated with the New Right reforms. Deliberating upon the British reforms, Ken Jones suggests,

*"The gap between intention and result remains wide. There have been changes that strengthen long-term conservatising pressures and demolish particular strong points of reform. Yet it is not possible to say either that conservative populism has become the dominant educational ideology, or that changes of a fundamental kind in educational financing and curricula have occurred."*

(Jones, 1983, p.134)

While from America, Shapiro would even have us question the very heart of this ideology.

*"Notwithstanding all of this, one is ultimately compelled to question whether the successful adoption of the reforms suggested in all of the reports could indeed cure the ills of the economy. It is likely that the attempt to "intensify" learning through increases in the formal demands of schools would, in the consumption-orientated ethos of contemporary culture, produce further alienation from school among*

*a great many adolescents and a heightened sense of the institution's coercive nature. "* (Shapiro, 1990, p.138)

Within this statement, Shapiro raises what I consider to be the two main criticism of the New Right philosophy; the social and professional implications of the reforms.

Pivotal to the ethos is the concept of choice. 'Choice' has become the fashionable slogan for the New Right, but like most slogans it tends to treat complex issues in a very simplistic way. 'Choice' is one of those words which demands approval since it relates to one's sense of 'freedom' and 'free will' which, in turn, is at the very heart of what we all believe is the very essence of being truly human and a whole person.

Therefore, it is difficult to argue against 'choice' in principle, although, deep down, we know that it may not be possible to deliver it in practice. For anyone to be against 'choice', in principle, puts themselves into the category of 'knowing better' than the chooser - a position correctly adopted by parents of young children, but one which has to be modified as the children grow older unless there is some kind of utopian vision of what is best for everyone.

In the rhetoric of the New Right it is claimed that more choice automatically means better quality and hence all, or at least most, kinds of choice should be catered for. The claim that choice means quality is based on a number of quite different factors. At one level, the connection between school and quality is based on the free market idea that parents would choose good schools, thereby eventually closing down poor schools. Edwards and Whitty raise a particularly interesting anomaly with the concept of choice creating quality in education.

*"... choice of school is not marginal choice. Encouraging or sponsoring the exit of parents from a school they judge to be unsatisfactory may concentrate the minds of teachers and administrators on improvements to ward off further losses. It may also diminish its size sufficiently to reduce drastically opportunities for children left behind, while denying the school effective parental*

*voices for change. Thus some parents' exercise of choice may leave others' choice diminished."* (Edwards & Whitty, 1992, p.106)

In addition, this assumption, regarding the benefits of choice, behoves the reformers to establish proper criteria upon which such a choice can be made. Of particular concern is the system's ability to establish concrete criteria upon which parents can adequately choose the school for their children. This is the corner-stone of the free market ideal. But, those who advocate a return to this free market situation have ignored the fact that free markets are only efficient when there is perfect information available and a perfect competition. The concept of 'perfect information' would entail some form of data about each school which is irrefutable, valid and reliable; information which does not contain any inherent weakness, bias or abnormality, while, a 'perfect competition' would encompass each school having the same access to resources, managerial expertise, parental interest and support, academic potential within its community, and a conducive aesthetic environment, since some schools would already have some, if not all, of these.

This is not the case with education, and it is difficult to see how it could be. The types of testing, and relative academic achievement scales, presented by both Britain and the USA as its 'perfect information', is fundamentally flawed and a significant weakness in their competitive process. More frightening, though, are the concerns with their acceptance of a 'perfect competition'. No one could ever argue that all parents have the same interest, enthusiasm, or commitment to excellence for their child's education.

Denis Lawton takes up this point,

*"Many parents are not in a position to know what is on offer, nor to know how to judge its quality, nor to pay for what they would like. Given that situation, to talk of a free market is either naive or hypocritical; it can also be argued that what parents want may not always be in the best interests either of the children or of the community as a whole."* (Lawton, 1992, p.85)

In addition, the ability of each school to co-opt similar managerial expertise onto their governing councils is an ambitious farce. Whether we like it or not, it is true that capitalist societies cause socio-economic imbalances resulting in a stratification of society based essentially on relative incomes. It is also true that, particularly in cities, this social stratification is also reflected in housing and accommodation with similar socio-economic families living in particular suburbs. Thereby, in most western cities, one will find the 'rich' suburbs, the 'semi-professional' suburbs, the 'working class' suburbs, and the 'poor' suburbs. Because schools do not tend to be only established in certain suburbs, but across them all, then, arguably, those schools situated in working-class or poor areas or, perhaps, rural areas would not have the same access to a pool of professional expertise that is more likely to reside in the rich or semi-professional areas. Such expertise would be a decided advantage to have as representation on the School Council when dealing with financial, personnel, and resource management issues. The fact that schools are locked into their sites clearly means an inequality in opportunity to establish self-managing school councils of equal strength and, therefore, the competition between the schools becomes unfair. Watt writes,

*"In affluent areas, many parents have substantial academic qualifications and the professional and managerial jobs to which these give access, so that their own life experience has made them familiar with what is needed for successful progress to the next phase of schooling and to well-rewarded employment. Many, likewise, have the sophistication and power to insist that it is provided, if teachers are not moved by their own beliefs to do so. In poor areas, there tends to be fewer parents with the experience of treading the road to success which would help them see restrictions imposed on their children through a non-academic curriculum emphasis, or the sophistication and power to impose their demands on a school staff."*

(Watt, 1989, p.24)

The imbalance in potential between various suburbs and communities based on socio-economic differences is not limited solely to managerial expertise. Other essential school

criteria are also affected. An obvious one is the aesthetic appearance of the school.

Traditionally, most school buildings and grounds tend to reflect their local community so that, again, those schools in the poorer suburbs are likely to look less attractive and less inviting than their middle and upper-class counterparts. Therefore, since this could be a determining factor for some parents when deciding on which school to send their child, it would be very unlikely that such a school would attract the same degree of interest and support.

Educational research also supports the understanding that the academic interest and success of students is strongly related to the educational background of the parents. This can be extended to suggest that the chances of academic success of students is much greater for students who come from well educated, professional or semi-professional parents. So, again, those schools situated in areas where there is a higher concentration of well educated parents, that is usually the more wealthy areas, will automatically have students who are higher school achievers. Any comparative test results will consequently advantage these schools.

The following comments by Fowler best summarize the glaring inequalities already existing within the American educational system and which mitigate against a fair competition between schools.

*"Equity and excellence are commonly presented as contradictory educational goals. However, Tennessee's experience with education reform suggests that a quite different relationship exists between them. It suggests that equity and adequacy provide the indispensable foundation for educational excellence. The establishment of equity is especially important if a competitive, hierarchical conception of excellence is to be implemented. However, in states like Tennessee, it would probably be difficult to implement even an egalitarian form of excellence without seriously addressing the issue of adequacy first. For ultimately teachers must implement education reforms. And teachers consider calls to excellence ludicrous as long as they are moonlighting to feed their families, placing wastebaskets under leaks*

*whenever it rains, and cancelling tests because their school's ancient copying machine is in the repair shop again."*

(Boyd & Kerchner, 1988, p.196)

New Right advocates would endeavour to squash these arguments by suggesting that through choice the parents can move their child to another school where the previously mentioned disadvantages do not exist. But how practical, feasible and likely is this to occur? Since it is usually the poorer, less educated families which are at risk, it is also the case that they are less likely to have the financial resources to pay for the additional transport costs or even the knowledge, inclination or desire to want to seek out enhanced educational opportunities for their children beyond their own community. Denis Lawton refers to the research of Adler and his colleagues which tends to support my sentiments. This research highlights the relative immobility of the students in spite of the Thatcher Government having introduced its educational reforms designed to encourage parents to choose supposedly more successful schools for their children, regardless of the site of the school relative to the home. It supports the belief that parents are either not making the choices as anticipated or are making their choices based on factors other than those perceived to be at the centre of quality in education.

*"Adler et al show that there is considerable support for the principle of the right to choose, although the vast majority of parents (about 90 per cent) have continued to prefer their local school. This is in keeping with other studies which show that proximity is probably the most important factor in choosing a school. There were significant geographical differences, however, in the percentage of parents opting to exercise choice - ranging from 2 or 3 per cent in rural areas to 25 per cent in some urban districts. And as parents become better informed, the percentage of 'choosers' continued to increase gradually. Where parents exercised choice, they tended to do so for reasons of safety of access, or the 'quality' of the area rather than for better academic standards or opportunities. Contrary to some predictions, there was no evidence that choosing was confined to middle class parents. ...All of these findings support the view that parents ought to be given some choice. To what extent they should*

*be exhorted to choose on the basis of schools' test results is quite a different question..."* (Lawton, 1992, p.95)

Lawton goes on to add some other concerning characteristics of the reforms, which are based on specific experiences of the new system now that it has been in operation for some years.

*"There were also negative features of the 1981 legislation in Scotland. There was no evidence to support the claim that bright working class children in 'deprived' areas particularly benefited from the new arrangements. And there was no evidence ... that the standards of schools ... had improved as a result of competition."* (Lawton, 1992, p.95)

However, there are more significant findings, purported by Lawton to have surfaced since the introduction of the new reforms, which strike at the very heart of the New Right free market ideology. He suggests that, rather than creating better schools and closing ineffectual schools, this new system is heightening existing and inherent disadvantages and handicapping attempts by schools to rectify their adverse predicament.

*"Schools that attracted more pupils often found it difficult to cope adequately with the increased numbers. On the other hand, no school had closed as a result of market forces, and those schools that had lost numbers of pupils found it difficult to respond positively to parents' wishes - for example, there was little they could do about making access to the school safer, or improving the attractiveness of a rough area; and, once in decline, it was very difficult for schools to recover. There were signs of increasing inequalities, widening of gaps between schools, and the danger of a 'two-tier system' developing."* (Lawton, 1992, p.95)

The resultant outcome of creating "inequality" is a consequence raised by a number of other commentators from within both the British and American systems. Central to this problem is the concern that choice is more available to those who are already



advantaged. The 'at risk' students from the poor and the working class families are less likely to gain the anticipated benefits from the free market educational system and will fall further behind as a consequence. Inherent, in such a scenario, is a potential for social deterioration and anarchy if the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' becomes an obvious chasm.

One has to accept that our schools are at the mercy of historical, cultural and social forces and no new innovation, no matter how well intended, can fully succeed without due consideration of these inhibiting factors. It would appear that the New Right movement has overlooked these constraints. Lawton adds,

*"What this excellent study illustrates is that choice, although desirable in principle, is not a panacea, and that market competition does not automatically solve problems of school organization or even necessarily raise standards. The issues surrounding choice and planning are much more complex than enthusiastic privatizers would have us believe. Perhaps an important point is beginning to emerge: the public want choice, and it is very important that they be given as much opportunity to exercise choice as possible. But that is not to say that choice is the most important factor; and care should be taken before constructing a whole system based on market competition - encouraging 'exit' rather than 'voice'."* (Lawton, 1992, p.96)

I believe this to be a very balanced quotation from Lawton since he not only raises the doubts about the New Right reforms but adds a very constructive thought in his last sentence. This concept of adding to, improving and enriching the reforms, rather than simply deriding them, is an issue that I will return to shortly.

A final criticism of the New Right reforms, which is not necessarily inherent within the ideology but rather in the manner with which aspects of the reforms have been implemented, is the ineffectual and damaging way that the governmental administrators have not supported their rhetoric and legislation with sufficient practical action. All too often affirmative action has been introduced to dissolve central authorities, devolve

management and disseminate resources, yet the specific logistics of how this is to be achieved, in order to ensure no school is deprived by the process, is far less well thought out. Consequently, through this imbalance and inequality of assistance and access to resources, various schools are, again, unfairly inconvenienced in the new educational order of competitiveness. A glaring example of this is the aforementioned lack of adequate financial and logistical support given to improve and upgrade the knowledge, understandings and skills of those parents, who were willing to take up the challenge of working on the school's governing council in the cause of self-management, but found the task beyond their present capabilities.

In closing this review of the success or otherwise of the New Right reforms, it is interesting to note the thoughts of Ken Jones.

*"The most fundamental claim of modernization is that it strengthens the links between education and the economy, and in doing so enhances the performance of both sectors. Yet despite all the changes it promotes, many structural failings of the British economy and education system remain, as untouched by the new strategies of Conservatism as they are unnoticed in right-wing diagnoses of decline"*  
(Jones, 1989, p.121)

Arguably, there are some serious implications associated with the introduction of any New Right initiatives. Therefore, it is important to look at the Australian educational scene and to determine whether it has been immune from such reforms. Moreover, it would seem prudent to answer some serious questions. For instance, if it were to be accepted that the Victorian Government had successfully commenced these reforms, are they likely to spread to other states ? Or, do aspects of the New Right ideology already exist within other state educational systems around Australia ? In the past, so many of our educational changes have had their origins in other countries, particularly Britain, so it would be foolish nonsense and naivety to assume that Australian educational systems would be insulated or isolated from such changes, particularly if governments saw some financial advantage from their introduction.

The complex inter-relationship of both the federal and state governments in the support for Australian education, and the influence of the Labour and Liberal factions at both the state and federal levels of government, would tend to suggest that no one particular ideology could easily and rapidly dominate educational initiatives. While it is true that these factors may act as a stabilizing or retarding influence on change, they also have the potential to create a situation which can lead to a multi-frontal attack on education through different changes being implemented concurrently by both the State and Federal Governments.

A very clear example of this is the current move towards a National Curriculum. This could well be presented as an essential tenet of an acceptance of New Right educational initiatives since, as outlined in earlier chapters, it fulfills the New Right's accountability expectation by linking educational outcomes to national priorities. This being the case, it would seem plausible to suggest that this direct political influence upon the curriculum would be more likely to have been implemented by a Liberal conservative government. Yet, here in Australia, it has been the ideal of the federal Labour government, especially under the ministerial administration of Mr. John Dawkins. While Mr. Dawkins was the federal Minister for Education, and co-incidentally, many of the states were also governed by Labour, the introduction of this reform was progressing rapidly much to the concern of many educationists. However, with the demise of a number of the state Labour governments, and the subsequent move of Mr. Dawkins to Treasurer, the process of change has been somewhat stalled.

Simultaneously though, the Victorian educational system is having to adjust to the desired reforms of their new Liberal government. These changes, involving the devolution of bureaucratic and centralized education authorities, the self-management of each public school, the emphasis on quality of teacher performance, and the improvement of schools based on competition for enrollments, can be seen in the light of earlier information as being New Right reforms or, at least, significantly influenced

by New Right thinking. Thus, for the Victorian schools, it could be argued that they are being attacked by both the Federal and State governments using New Right proposals, even though these two governments supposedly support opposing political ideologies.

But, what of the other states within Australia ? John Watt from the Murdoch University in Western Australia introduces his article, "Devolution of Power: The Ideological Meaning", with

*"The 1970s saw in some states, notably Victoria and South Australia, and in the Australian Capital Territory, a break with ... tradition, and a move towards devolution of power. It has taken the intervening decade for the trend to reach Western Australia where, at present, successive waves of change are breaking over the schooling system. The consistent aim which links the changes and proposals for change into coherent policy shift is to dismantle much of the central administration structure and hand over to individual schools responsibility for curriculum planning and, ultimately, for financial and personnel management, under a progressive scheme which, according to the central policy statement, is planned eventually to give schools even the authority to hire (and presumably to fire) their own staff"* (Watt, 1989, p.19)

While Alan Ruby writes in the text edited by Carla Fasano and Bob Winder, "Education Policy in Australia : Practices and Perceptions", that

*"Australia is no exception - the system of school, class, teacher and common curriculum imported from Ireland and Scotland continues. Even the more recent renewal proposals are in one sense a celebration of the basic pattern of service delivery. The most recent schools renewal proposal speaks of 'a strategy to revitalise within the New South Wales state education system'. The changes are to the mechanisms which distribute services rather than the processes of teaching and learning."* (Fasano & Winder, 1991 , p.16)

Meanwhile, Clarrie Burke from the Queensland University of Technology discusses the emergence of a definite policy on the devolution of "power and responsibility" to

Queensland schools due to the softening of the Queensland Governments attitude to such a reform. His article, "Devolution of Responsibility to Queensland Schools : Clarifying the Rhetoric, Critiquing the Reality", in a 1992 edition of the Journal of Educational Administration, traces the progress of the Queensland Government's "Queensland Education (General Provisions) Act 1989" legislation.

Although I do not intend to review the degree of implementation of New Right strategies, or their relative effectiveness in these other Australian states, it is worth noting that, arguably, most states and territories have dabbled with this ideology to some degree. Here in Tasmania, in late January of 1993, the Minister for Education, Mr. Beswick, was questioned by the Opposition in Parliament regarding the Tasmanian Government's attitude to the Victorian educational reforms. Under the headline of "Schools Reform Agenda Denied" (Mercury, 25/1/93) Mark Bendeich, a journalist from Hobart's "Mercury" newspaper, reports that,

*"The State Government denies it plans to follow radical education reforms of appointing business managers to schools and putting principals on performance contracts.*

*The Minister for Education, Mr. John Beswick, distanced himself from the Victorian reforms yesterday after the Opposition called on him to rule out their introduction to Tasmanian state schools.*

*Mr. Beswick said the Government, like the Opposition, favoured the move toward greater self-management by schools but could not foresee it going as far as Victoria."*

To this end, the draft copy of the "New Education Act for Tasmania", published in September of 1993, supports the trend towards the state schools becoming more self-managing. Clause 26, "Functions of school councils", and clause 27, "Powers of school councils", clearly establish increased roles for the school councils in the establishment of the aims of the school through developing the school "charter", assisting in the appointment of the Principal and ancillary staff, helping to formulate the school's discipline and student behaviour policy, and the daily management of school

affairs. The difficulty is that one is not privy to the reasons for such changes to the Act and the government, rather than initiating just such an illuminating discussion into the basis for the changes, is content to allow the prevailing common acceptance of the perceived benefits of school self-management to continue to influence the community consultation process for the implementation of the Act. Given the current poor fiscal position of the state of Tasmania, it is likely that the move by the government towards self-managing schools is centred on anticipated economic benefits, as proposed by the New Right ideology, while the community, by-and-large, would see this same change as being made for the enhancement of the educational environment of the schools. Unfortunately, this potentially important divergence in reasoning was never allowed to be discussed and remains unresolved. In this light, the issue of the Tasmanian government's commitment to, or involvement in, New Right initiatives remains contentious but the suspicion can be raised.

Arguably, most Australian state educational systems are already being affected by degrees of application of New Right strategies by governments. Undoubtedly, governments of all persuasions have been influenced, to some degree, by the political strategies of either or both of the British and American governments during the 1980s, and are, therefore, introducing elements of New Right ideology. Perhaps, most will avoid the radical extremes of the Thatcher era, although some observers would suggest that the Victorian Government seems to be well down the same path.

Be that as it may, it is interesting to note that, while the state education systems are tending to decentralize and to establish almost 'private school management systems', there are many independent schools which are looking to develop centralized systems in order to create savings. The Catholic schools in Australia are a prime example. For much of this century, as the number of Catholic schools grew rapidly, they were predominantly controlled by individual religious communities. Today, throughout Australia, more and more of these once independent schools are joining their state's or

diocese's Catholic Education Office. Even various Christian schools are forming a formal alliance in order to forge a more effective and efficient organization for attracting funding and sharing of resources. This must surely raise some skepticism about the true economic advantages of decentralization and self-management.

If the current trend, which sees Australia drifting towards more conservative governments, both in Federal and State arenas, continues, it is quite possible that a wider adoption of the more radical strategies will gain favour. Therefore, it is critical that teachers and educational professionals are fully aware of the implications for schools and education of such reforms, and are prepared to actively participate in the processes of discussion and adoption of them.

Our advantage is that we can see the effects of such changes on the educational systems in other countries. The problem is that we could become too concerned with the ideological issues, or the social problems, or the damage to our professional reputations should our opinions be ignored. Such an attitude may induce Australian educationists to inactivity, passivity, apathy or complete withdrawal from consultation regarding such issues. Michael Apple cites just such a response in America as it was being seemingly overwhelmed by the reforms.

*"As all this has been happening , most people in curriculum have largely stood by, watching from the sidelines as if this was a fascinating game that had to do with politics, not education. Others may have bemoaned their fate, but fled into increasingly technical procedural questions, thereby again confirming the artificial separation between 'how to' curriculum questions and those involving the real relations of culture and power in the world."*

(Apple, 1990, p.379)

Even though some of the actions of governments and their administration may be directed at silencing educationists, or limiting the authority of teachers within the educational debate, it is essential that all associated with education remain calm,

collected and committed to fully participating in any consultative process. It may well be that the reforms are not the 'watershed' ideology that politicians wish to portray them as but rather a 'smokescreen' for economic rationalization. This sentiment is similarly expressed by Brooks who wrote,

*"It will become increasingly important to ask the question in the nineties whether a change in educational terminology signifies a fundamental change in direction. Experienced teachers have long adopted a critical attitude to the educational jargon of the moment and look behind it to ask whether it signifies any real change in attitude, outlook or direction."*

(Brooks, 1991, p.194)

So, educationists, regardless of their professional indignation, must be at the forefront of clearing the 'smoke' from the reforms and assisting all to understand and realize the critical issues at stake. The easiest response would be to attack and condemn these changes, but this could well be more emotive in nature rather than logical and constructive. As a teacher, it is exceedingly difficult not to be strongly affected by presumptions regarding the inherent disparaging attitudes of politicians for education and the teaching profession. In addition, educationists, subconsciously or consciously, sense the subordination of education to economic values; the accepting of questionable economic principles as having higher importance than maintaining or enhancing current levels of educational resources. One cannot help feeling that politicians, by and large, believe that what is good for the economy becomes what is good for education, and that, education is only beneficial to the extent that it is beneficial in economic terms. It is not easy to accept that, within this perspective, Australia can have too much education when its economic cost is determined to be excessive. Naturally, educators would want to maximize the intellectual, cultural, academic, political, spiritual, social and economic development of all people, yet economic imperatives would suggest that people can be too well educated, have access to too much learning, and be too well prepared for the social good. A truly irksome point of view for all those dedicated to the teaching profession and to the abundance of potential benefits which it offers.



Within such an economics dominated culture, non-business or non-industrial activities, including education, struggle to validate their outcomes in acceptable ways. Economics tends to want to reduce all activity to measurable economic activity in order to ensure that the output justifies the input. Unfortunately, educational output is not easily determined, nor is it economically quantifiable, and, as such, it can be registered as requiring a very large economic input but delivering no economic output. In this way, the financial commitment of the government to education becomes exceedingly questionable and vulnerable to extraneous economic influences.

Given the propensity for the existence of such a fragile relationship between governments and education systems, it is quite understandable for educationists to vehemently question the very basic tenets of economic rationalism. It is easily acknowledged that, within a modern capitalist society, there are various tasks, duties and vocations which would require a specific, technical and management language and process, as presented in economic ideologies, in order to successfully complete their responsibilities. Antagonists would argue that the mistake is in assuming these principles and practices have a generic nature, particularly when applied to human, non-ordered, relational activities. That is to say, the claim by economic ideologies, which includes the New Right, to universally influence our understanding of the whole of social life needs to be questioned and challenged.

A very pertinent example of this challenge to the generic relevance of economic principles is the assumption, within the New Right ideology, that public schools should be run like private schools. Although private schools are still unable to gauge the economic value of their output, their continued viability is governed by business processes which are, understandably, influenced by economic principles. By necessity, the management of this type of school is underpinned by economics. Notwithstanding the significance of this economic factor in the successful and ongoing functioning of such schools, they are also able to utilize other factors, such as, enrollment policies,

academic scholarships, enhanced curriculum resources, and the aesthetic appearance of the school, in order to make the school more attractive to potential clients, and so, positively influence the financial viability of the school. This is to say, private schools utilize many aspects of their total independence and freedom to ensure they continue to remain appealing to a selective sector of society and, thereby, remain economically successful.

On the other hand, public schools, as the name implies, were established as a form of universal service to all eligible children in need of an education from within the local community. Public schools were created to essentially fulfill a non-economic objective, other than maintaining social order and giving every generation the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in a capitalist society, of providing an avenue for every person to achieve their individual right to have access to an education. As such, public schools are expected to cater for the needs of all students, including those from remote communities, various categories of disability, disadvantaged groups, low and high achievers, and all types of socio-economic classes. All of this is expected to be achieved in addition to maintaining minimal costs to constituent families and at the relative mercy of the government's prevailing attitude towards the appropriate level of educational funding.

New Right purists, such as Hayek and Friedman, would remove this limitation upon this strategy by allowing public schools to charge fees, in accordance with their own specific needs, and to abolish compulsory education (Marginson, 1993, p.72). I firmly believe that most Australians would find such actions to be alarming and regressive. It is worth remembering that comments made by Mrs. Thatcher, which suggested that their New Right reforms were going to allow the government controlled schools to start charging fees, were quickly refuted and corrected by her Minister for Education. This is a clear indication of the enormous unacceptability of such an action, as well as, highlighting the selective manner by which governments have inculcated the New Right

reforms. It can be argued that most governments, including the Victorian government, have not introduced New Right reforms to education in their totality but, rather, have chosen advantageous New Right principles in order to achieve predetermined outcomes. The New Right ideology has offered a justification and a process to the government seeking to make quite significant and irregular changes.

However, to return to the realm of public education within the Australian context. More particularly, how the New Right ideology promotes the concept of the purchaser, the students and their families, having the freedom to choose their preferred producer, the school, but, at the same time, it does not presume that the public school has the right, directly or indirectly, through fee levels and enrollment policies for example, to refuse or obstruct the enrollment of particular students. If asked to state what one considers to be the most fundamental dimension of being a private school, I am sure that most private school principals would acknowledge this as being the freedom to set fees and to establish enrollment policies. So, any claim by the New Right doctrine to suggest that self-management strategies will make state controlled educational systems more cost efficient, just like their private school counterparts, is fallacious. Private schools and public schools are inherently different in a number of distinctive ways and merely altering the managerial structure of the public schools, in order to make them appear to be more like the private schools, will not overcome these significant differences. These distinctive and irrefutable differences between these two educational institutions is no more clearly reflected than in the variances within the legal obligations of the public schools as compared to the private schools. For instance, there are great variances within the expectations of public schools compared to private schools in the areas of mandatory responsibility under the equity and freedom of information legislations. It is also true that, in many formal actions, public schools are covered by statutory obligations, whereas, private schools have to attend to contractual obligations.

Therefore, public school management can never be fully transformed to that of a private school. In neo-classical accounting terms, the public service obligations of public schools will only ever show as additional costs to the government and never as additional outputs. This means that the method used within the New Right paradigm to analyze the market value of public education will always label it as inefficient in comparison with private education because its unit costs are, by definition, higher. That is to say, in economic terms, changing the public school management structure will not positively affect the overall market value of public education so that it will always remain as a deficit commodity.

In summary then, particularly within the field of education, one can clearly see the limitations of the New Right economic rationalism and comprehend how its universal application can lead to serious misconceptions. In specific terms, this analysis must surely call into question the credibility of the cornerstone of the New Right educational reforms, school self-management, at least as it is defined within this interpretation. This innovation is based on a model of public school management mirroring that of private schools, but it does not give the school the same freedom to act totally independently. More generally though, this discussion can help to explain the immense frustration, and perhaps anger, within educationists, who wish to challenge government reforms and promote the benefits of education, but realize that their arguments are ignored because they are not couched in economic terms.

Be that as it may, it is worth emphasizing again that this certainly does not mean that educationists should take the 'high ground' and adamantly defend ideological preferences, but rather, they should eagerly and enthusiastically contribute to the discussion with professional insights while, at the same time, appreciating and acknowledging the political, social and economic concerns which are forcing governments to implement such strategies. It is quite feasible to suggest that the appalling financial situation in Victoria had created the conducive and necessary

environment to allow the Kennett government an opportunity to introduce its relatively radical reforms. Without the conditions of a very large fiscal deficit, these reforms may never have been contemplated or have been so easily implemented. Again, I refer to Michael Apple who firmly believes,

*"My argument has not been that members of the curriculum field have been totally powerless, have only been puppets whose strings are pulled by large scale social forces beyond their control. I am asking that we be realistic, however. If social, political and economic forces and movements have played such a large role in determining the shape of the curriculum and have provided much of the impetus behind those whose knowledge is taught, then individual action by curriculum scholars is not enough. We can and must join together with other groups who need the knowledge of curricular debates and traditions and who wish to make schools progressive in intent and outcome.*

*There are collective voices we can join with, that we can contribute something of value to, and perhaps just as importantly can learn from."*

(Apple, 1990, p.382)

In order to remain credible and relevant to any discussion on the state of the nation, and the role of education within this parameter, educationists must be open to be influenced by the real world and all of its current economic elements. To have vehemently defended the maintenance of the status quo in educational resourcing within the state of Victoria, at the beginning of 1993, would have meant denying the financial hardship the people faced in having to rebuild the economic viability of the state. Such a stance would have been, understandably, ludicrous and self-defeating; the public would have ignored the argument. Therefore, in order to remain influential within such an educational debate, it is vital to acknowledge and accept the limiting factors while firmly defending what is essential to schooling and challenging what is erroneous or unsuitable within the determining principles.

Apple elaborates upon this view when he writes,

*"The right has done a good job of showing that decisions about the curriculum, about whose knowledge is to be made 'official knowledge', are inherently involved in political and cultural conflicts and power. And unless we learn to live in that world and join with others to find the collective voice that speaks for the long progressive educational tradition that lives in so many of us, the knowledge our children will be taught will reflect that unequal power. Sidelines may be comfortable places to sit. But they may have little to do with the lives of the real children and teachers who are losing today."*

(Apple, 1990, p.383)

As government controlled education systems around Australia begin to develop a propensity for introducing reforms, which, arguably, are influenced by New Right beliefs, it is essential for educationists to highlight the deficiencies of just such a strategy. While not diminishing the need to consider the economic function of education, it is crucial to emphasize the multi-functional nature of the role education plays in helping to ensure democratic relationships across the whole of our society. It is the predisposition of economic ideologies, like the New Right doctrine, to want to be the sole determining influence over educational decisions which must be accentuated as the source of greatest concern.

It could be argued that the inherent conservatism of education, and the complexities of having both a federal and state government involved in educational initiatives, would offer significant protection against radical changes ever being successful. However, the review of the changes which have taken place in Victoria would suggest that the implementation of educational changes is far more problematic. It has already been proposed that this particular situation clearly shows that the duality of government involvement, federal and state, does not, necessarily, offer such protection, yet it would seem to support an understanding that the traditional conservatism within the education system ( the teachers, principals and educational professionals) and for education within society, does tend to slow down the pace of possible changes and may even affect the degree to which such doctrine is introduced. Although this perspective does give some

comfort, it must not lead to apathy. By being open to allowing some form of economic rationalism into educational reforms, it becomes more likely that its influence could become less concerning and questionable and, therefore, could more easily be progressively introduced into the educational system. In addition, should some unsuitable economic rationalistic ideals within any introduced reforms gain a degree of acceptability, in spite of this intrinsic conservatism, then these will also be difficult to displace, just as some of our more acceptable, but historically aligned, facets have been because of this ingrained resistance to change in the educational realm.

To conclude this review of the New Right ideology, it would seem important to highlight what some critics perceive as being its most crucial dimension, that one cannot look past its demeaning general attitude towards people. Its basic economic tenet of perceiving the student as a consumer-investor renders the degree of their participation in education as being subject to the interests of the national or state economy, which, in turn, is surrogate to the interests of those groups, namely in the fields of business and industry, which command the most economic power. Moreover, this means that people can only ever expect to get a level of quality or quantity of education which the nation or state can afford. This leads to an understanding of education as being an investment in the future. Under such an understanding, the higher and more expensive levels of education are only economically justifiable when the costs of educating a person, at this level, are compensated by the certainty of their gaining future employment in which their wages are so much greater than they would otherwise have been and, therefore, they can repay the costs of their education. Underpinning just such a view is the monetary value of the human being to the economy, which leads to the necessity to measure people in terms of their monetary value within the national or state economic plan.

This concept, within economic theories, of measuring the value of human beings in terms of their monetary value, has been called “the science of human capital”

(Marginson, 1993, p.32). The human capital theory would only support a governmental investment in education if it was deemed cost effective in achieving associated improvements in business and industrial economic activities. Beyond this parameter, human capital theory would render the costs for increased education as an individual person's responsibility since they would be investing in their own future and could, later on, offer their enhanced skills and knowledge onto the free market and be repaid for their initial financial outlay. It is quite easy to see how this theory could have influenced the national push for increased retention rates within secondary education, during the late 1980s, and the introduction of HECS fees into tertiary studies, while it would also support the New Right's ideal of introducing general school fees into secondary schools.

The problem for this theory, as Marginson quite rightly points out, is the faint traces of slavery imbedded within it; of human beings being valued for what they can do for other people, and of people being bonded to someone else's will or opinion in regard to the relative impact of their actions on the economics of the state. Marginson writes,

*"Slaves were the ultimate form of human capital, valued for their intelligence as well as their physical strength."*

(Marginson, 1993, p.31)

Arguably, human capital theory places human beings as the 'slaves' of the state and, as such, the state should only invest money into them, for instance, by educating them, if there is some economical advantage to doing so. This also presents an element of totalitarianism as the government, seemingly guided by a singular economic objective, is acting to significantly influence the life experiences and opportunities of the people, since it views the rights of the individual as being secondary to that of the economic condition of the state or nation.

If these perceptions have some substance, then why are there not more people condemning these actions, since such concepts as slavery and totalitarianism are disgusting for most Australians ? Quite possibly, it is the call for "choice", as the



catchcry of the New Right movement, which not only stimulates interest and support for the ideology, but also hides these unsavoury qualities. Choice promotes a sense of freedom and the use of individual rights, which is almost the opposite outcome of a commitment to a human capital theory. People are more conscious of the supposed commitment to choice, within the New Right doctrine, than they are about the other inherent components of this ideology, and so, their distaste for this negative side is never truly aroused.

But really, is this commitment to choice as creditable as the New Right movement would have us believe ? To reiterate some earlier pertinent points. This free market doctrine is based on a premise that choice is about people choosing the best school, the school which will offer the individual student their greatest opportunity for academic success and, hence, give them their brightest future in the work force. As has already been outlined, this vocational orientation is not the sole basis for why students, and their families, choose particular schools. That is to say, the New Right ideology sees a singular dimension to choosing a school, academic success, but, in reality, this is a multi-dimensional process, which may include academic success, but also could include many other aspects of the school, such as proximity, culture, friendships, family traditions, additional costs, and so forth. This erroneous misconception by the New Right, in regard to how families choose schools for their children, clearly undermines its reliance on the positiveness of choice to overcome its more unpleasant qualities.

Needless to say, as an educationist one cannot help but to have some very serious reservations about the inherent values and principles of the New Right ideology. However, the question still remains as to what extent are these values and principles, and hence, New Right thinking, driving current Australian educational reforms ? Chapter 8 endeavours to clarify this issue.

## CHAPTER 8

# Conclusion

During these times of significant fiscal restraint by governments, seemingly caused by a great deal of uncertainty in the state, national and global economies, it is quite understandable, even obligatory, for them to review the economic implications of all that they do or propose to do. In this way, there always appears to be an economic component to every decision and really, by necessity, this should be the actions of a responsible government. However, this financial accountability process can arouse the suspicion that economic outcomes are the sole ideology driving the political agenda. This perception can be easily reinforced by one's awareness of economic rationalistic doctrines, like the New Right movement, which lay claims to having generic solutions to all governmental issues. Hence, there is an ever-present propensity to label governmental changes, particularly if one has a personal dislike for the implications, as purely economic imperatives which have no other beneficial outcomes. Obviously, this is a simplistic view and the difficulty is to logically and suitably determine the appropriate reasons for government actions and then to develop a comprehensive appraisal of the possible effects of these particular actions.

Throughout my review of the influence of "new right" thinking on educational reforms, both here in Australia and overseas, a significant degree of uncertainty regarding the depth of adoption of the New Right doctrine has always existed. The presence of general economic depression, in association with a great deal of variation in the political actions and possible implementation processes, has meant that it is not an easy task to unequivocally assert that a particular change is, solely, a New Right outcome.

Therefore, my argument is that the reforms are at least in part driven by "new right" thinking, and this was particularly evident when one considered the motives for the reforms, and not just the reforms themselves. It was clear that within the reforms implemented, in order to achieve school-based self-management, autonomy and choice, that the basic values and principles underpinning the changes were more in keeping with economic rationalism rather than educational outcomes. As such, the potential to achieve

widely acknowledged educational benefits from these changes was significantly limited, if not prevented, by the processes by which these changes were implemented and supported. Hence, the central issue for educationists, within the current educational reform debate, is to highlight the limitations imposed upon the changes if they are predominately motivated by the inappropriate basic values and principles of the New Right ideology.

The problem for the educational profession is that it is exceedingly difficult to be seen to be arguing against such things as self-management and choice because they seemingly have an inherent human empowering quality about them. To argue against policies, which are supposedly offering the opportunities for choice and self-management, could cause one to be denigrated and ignored. Yet, to not do so would mean that the underlying values are not being recognized and acknowledged, and educational systems are being carelessly linked to unacceptable outcomes.

Herein lies the challenge for all those closely associated with schools and education in Australia today. We are inadvertently thrust into the midst of significant and crucial educational changes and it is in response to our wish to be, and to be seen as being, professionals that we are bound to make a positive response. The challenge for us is to respond constructively and positively for the good of all and not to simply defend our own personal philosophical principles or, worse, to withdraw to institutional 'safe-havens' and expect the status-quo to remain or the problems to eventually go away.

In a free market we also have 'choice' and our choice should be to contribute to the adoption of appropriate and considered educational reforms. Hence we should ask ourselves the questions - What is good about the New Right reforms; what must be avoided in the New Right reforms; and how can I ensure that everyone comes to fully understand the distinctions between these two critical aspects of the New Right educational reforms ?

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